

**Regions, minorities and European policies:
A state of the art report on Muslim Minorities (Turks and Pomaks)
In Central South Planning Region (Bulgaria)**

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SOUTH CENTRAL PLANNING REGION



South Central Planning Region includes the following districts: Pazardzhik, Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Smoljan, Kardzhali and Haskovo. Border districts Smoljan, Kardzhali and Haskovo are the subject of the current research.

1. Introduction

The subject of the research are the Muslim minority groups – Turks and Pomaks (Muslim Bulgarians) – living in the South-Central region of Bulgaria, which is located along the border with Greece (and partially Turkey). The research does not include the Roma groups from the region, since the specific life style of this ethnic community and its place among the other ethnic and religious groups are not directly dependent on the proximity of the border.

The question about the place of the Muslim population in the Bulgarian nation state has been raised by Bulgarian intellectuals and politicians even before the liberation of the country. The categorically prevailing opinion was that Christians and Muslims have to be equal and to have the same opportunities for economic and cultural development in the future Bulgarian state. The reality, however, turned out to be more complicated.

The decisions taken on the Berlin Congress (1878) had an important influence on the fate of Muslim population of Bulgarian lands. After the Russian–Turkish war of 1877–1878, the Great powers agreed at the Congress upon the formation, borders and structure of the Principality of Bulgaria. The decisions, taken at the Congress included measures for protection of rights and property of the Muslim population of Bulgaria. This was one of the reasons why Bulgarian Muslims avoided the fate of Turks, forced to leave Peloponnese, Attica and the Sandzhak of Belgrade, following the creation of Greek and Serbian states in the first half of the 19th century.

The territories and the populations, which are in the focus of this research project, were incorporated into the borders of Bulgaria in several stages. Some of them initially became a part of the autonomous region Eastern Rumelia, which in 1885 united with the Principality of Bulgaria. The southernmost regions of present-day Bulgaria were annexed as a result of the Balkan Wars (1912–1913).

The tensions between Bulgarian (for a short period of time – Eastern Rumelian) authorities and the Muslim population (Pomaks and Turks) appeared in the first place because of the change of the status of Muslims in the new state. From politically dominating majority, Muslims became a minority. The new legislation and the new authorities were perceived as a violation of their rights and interests. This perception was intensified by a desire of a part of the Bulgarian society to reproduce the Ottoman model of government, but with the reversed roles.

In general, during the whole period after the restoration of the Bulgarian state, relations between the majority (Christian Bulgarians) and the minority (Muslim Bulgarians and Turks) were based on two models. The nationalistic model strongly influenced the state policies, after nationalism turned from an opposition idea into a constituent element of the international law in the 19th century. The traditional model of coexistence of various ethnic and religious groups, which developed in the Balkans in the course of the centuries, opposed the nationalistic model, but the range and mechanism of its activities were limited.

The situation of Muslim population of the Bulgarian part of the Rhodope mountain was further complicated by the proximity of the border. The border disrupted the traditional economic links with the lowlands along the Aegean coast and separated relatives from neighboring villages. After the World War II, this border became a part of the “iron curtain,” which led to communist regime to reinforce control over the region by attempting to erase or weaken religious and ethnic differences.

The integration of Bulgaria into the European Union – the union which tries to look at cultural, ethnic and religious diversities not as a problem, but as a treasure, and the removal of barriers for interaction and exchange between residents of border regions, offered a possibility for rebuilding relations between communities and individuals on new grounds. This is a way for overcoming mistrust and desire to dominate the “others,” inherited from the past.

2. The case of Turks and Pomaks in the South Central Region (SCR) of Bulgaria

2.1. Brief historical excursus on the Bulgarian state policies towards Muslim minorities

The Bulgarian state policies towards minorities were defined immediately after the restoration of the Bulgarian state in the aftermath of the Russian–Turkish war of 1877–1878. The Tarnovo Constitution (1879), taking into consideration the demands, put forward by the Berlin Treaty (1878) – the first international document regulating the rights of the minority groups, – envisaged freedom of religion and wide cultural autonomy. Muslims were guaranteed the right to their places of worship, schools, newspapers and journals. Administratively, they were divided into districts, headed by a *Mufti*, and including both Turks and Pomaks. In Turkish schools, which were financially supported by the state, the language of instruction was Turkish. Since the formation of the Bulgarian National Assembly, Turks had their political representatives in the parliament, however without forming a political party on ethnic grounds. Yet, the rights of the Muslim population were often not respected, despite the fact that they were guaranteed by the principal law of the state – the Constitution.

After the unification of Eastern Rumelia with the Principality of Bulgaria, a large Muslim population “appeared” within the borders of the new state. The periodic tensions between Bulgaria and Turkey had a negative influence on the popular attitudes towards minorities. After the proclamation of the independent Kingdom of Bulgaria in 1908, the rights of Turks in Bulgaria were regulated anew by the Constantinople Treaty of 1909.

The Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 again resulted in the change of political borders and led to mass migrations. At that time, the first forced mass attempt to Christianize Pomaks was undertaken by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, supported by the state (Georgiev, Trifonov: 1995). Following the Second Balkan War, the Turkish-Bulgarian treaty of 1913 declared that respect of religious freedom would be guaranteed. Neuilly Treaty of 1919 confirmed these guarantees.

After the 1923 coup in Bulgaria, the state limited the autonomy of Turkish schools. Following the proclamation of Attaturk’s Turkish Republic, the two states signed a treaty of friendship in 1925, which again reaffirmed the minority rights, but Turkey lost its role of the champion of the Turkish minority. In 1926, Bulgaria and Turkey agreed to nationalize the property of those who emigrated during the Balkan Wars. Between the two World Wars, Bulgaria strove to respect the minority rights as a part of its policy of peaceful revisionism, aimed at the decisions of the Paris Conference. Following the coup of 1934, all organizations in the country, including those of the Bulgarian Turks, were outlawed. The number of Turkish schools decreased. Turkey and Bulgaria reached an agreement about emigration of 10,000 people per year.

The state policy towards the Pomaks became more active. In 1937, society *Rodina* (‘Homeland’) was formed. Its main goal was to integrate the Pomak community into the Bulgarian nation. The leaders of the organization proclaimed that its basic task was to increase the economic and cultural level of the community and above all to stimulate the formation of Bulgarian self-consciousness among the Pomaks, through eradication of the opposition between Bulgarian ethnicity and Muslim confession (Anagnostou 2005b); they introduced the term ‘Bulgarian Mohammedan’. For seven years the organization managed to translate the *Quran* in Bulgarian, it tried to form a ‘Bulgarian Mohammedan’ clergy, independent from the Chief Office of *Mufti* (Stoianov 1998: 86). The declared voluntary character of the process soon turned into a forced substitution of the names of Pomaks and Turks in the Rhodopes with Bulgarian names. The most active phase of this policy occurred during the World War II (1942–1944). During the same period, almost all of the newspapers in Turkish language were shut down. After 1989 the assessment of the *Rodina* activities was contradictory. For some specialists it was a “voluntary missionary organization” leading the so called “Bulgarian–Mohammedan revival” which was unjustly banned by the communist regime (Panaiotova 1994: 273–

281; for details see Anagnostou 2005b). According to others, the organization used the same methods of assimilation and integration of the Pomaks, which later were implemented by the communist regime (Stoianov 1998: 86; Todorova 1998: 476).

In September 1944, the anti-fascist coalition, dominated by the communists, took power in Bulgaria. For a short period, this led to a positive change in the policies towards the ethno-religious minorities. Turks received a wide cultural autonomy. Old names of Muslim Bulgarians were restored and restrictions on wearing of traditional clothes were lifted. Private Turkish schools were legalized. This autonomy was seen as a step towards integrating Turks into a transnational communist society on the Soviet model (Stoianov 1998:118–119).

The tolerant policy towards ethnic and religious minorities, applied until 1948, was gradually replaced by harsher measures, especially after the April plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (1956), when the state policy towards minorities was again directed towards assimilation. The new concept was “integration of minorities into a monolithic socialist nation”. Even before that, in 1953, a campaign against religious holidays started. In 1958 wearing of traditional Muslim clothes and a year later the circumcision were outlawed. Religious education was replaced by the secular one – the private schools were closed down and replaced by the state schools for Turkish, Jewish and Armenian communities.

Measures for modernization and economic development of regions, populated by Muslims, were undertaken. Since 1960, the number of Muslim clerics was significantly decreased. The state continued its policy of “solving” the minority issue through emigration. This policy, however, was different for different groups. State supported emigration of Turks to Turkey, but tried to prevent the emigration of Muslim Bulgarians. The next large emigration wave of Turkish population occurred between 1949 and 1951, when over 150,000 Turks left Bulgaria. This wave was to a large extent a reaction to the collectivization of the land. In 1948, after the conclusion of the Paris Conference, the authorities began the resettlement of Muslim population from border regions to the interior of the country.

In the beginning of 1960s, a new mechanism for dealing with minorities was employed – changing of the names, which were seen as a mark of “foreign” ethnic and religious affiliation. The Roma Muslims were the first to be affected by this process – from 1962 onwards, their names were being replaced with Bulgarian Christian names; the nomadic Roma were forced to settle. In 1964 an unsuccessful attempt to change the names of Pomaks in western Rhodopes was carried out. These measures were met by a persistent resistance of the population – several villages rose in open rebellion. The Party leadership in Sofia turned to threats and coercion: army units and tanks were sent against the disobedient villages, and at the same time the local authorities were blamed for the whole situation. They were accused of misunderstanding the “voluntary” character of the action and of exceeding their authority. This policy did not include Turks. In 1968, Bulgaria and Turkey reached an agreement on reunification of divided families, which allowed numerous Turks to leave the country. Bulgarian state took further steps to eliminate external identification marks of Muslim Bulgarians and from 1970 to 1972, and in some regions until 1974, their names were substituted with Bulgarian ones.

In mid 1980s, for the first time such measures were initiated also against Turks. They were declared to be the descendants of Bulgarians, who were forced to adopt the Turkish identity, and for this reason the process of changing of their names with Bulgarian ones was named “revival process.” In the space of a few weeks in 1984–1985 the Bulgarian government forced nearly one million Turks – more than a tenth of Bulgaria’s population – to change their names. The use of Turkish language and traditional clothes was outlawed, and Turkish graveyards were demolished. This campaign, incomparably larger than any other undertaken before, was possible due to a combination of several reasons, which were seen by the Party leaders as a “window of opportunity”. International setting also

appeared favorable. The Soviet Union was powerful enough to protect the Bulgarian Communist Party leaders against possible Turkish and Western reprisals, but not strong enough to impose its own more tolerant policy towards nationalities. Turkey was seen as both a threat after the invasion of Cyprus in 1974, and as internationally discredited after the military coup of 1980 (Dimitrov 2000: 2–4; 12)

The resistance against the forced name-changing of Bulgarian Turks was expressed by a wave of demonstrations in the spring of 1989. The government of Todor Zhivkov tried to find a way out from the situation in the Vienna convention on human rights, signed also by Bulgaria, and opened the border to make the activists of the Turkish resistance movement to leave the country. During this forced emigration, which became known as “the great trip,” more than 360,000 Turks left the country. Turkey’s decision to close its border in August 1989 left thousands of people in no man’s land, having sold their possessions and yet being deprived of the possibility to emigrate. Soviet efforts to resolve the crisis through the shuttle diplomacy of its ambassador to Ankara, failed to achieve any results. In the fall of 1989, Moscow openly supported the internal opposition within the Communist Party – some of the Party leaders opposed to the assimilation policy of Zhivkov, accusing him that he once more pushed the country into international isolation. The dissident groups, then in the process of formation, used the debacle to openly criticize the government, and established links with imprisoned Turkish intellectuals (Asenov, 1996: 121; Dimitrov 2000: 16–18).

Political changes in Bulgaria in the end of 1989 and the subsequent democratization enabled a full restoration of the rights of ethnic and religious communities. The acceptance of ethnic diversity by the two major political forces in Bulgaria – although with some reserves on the side of the former Communist party, which in April 1990 changed its name into the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), and more sincere in the case of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) – created conditions for dealing with ethnic problems within a democratic political framework. Turks and a part of Pomaks reacquired their original names, widespread construction of mosques started, and young Muslims got possibility to continue their education in Turkey and Arab states. Those who were oppressed due to their opposition to the name changing were rehabilitated. Part of those who emigrated to Turkey have returned or took dual citizenship. In 1990, the first political party, representing Turks and other Muslim communities in Bulgaria, was formed – the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF). The MRF has been present in all the parliaments since 1990 to now, and currently it is also a member of the governing coalition.

Bulgaria’s president signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in October 1997, and the parliament ratified it in 1999. At the same time Bulgaria has signed and ratified all internationally-adopted conventions on human rights protection (including the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages), automatically making them part of its own legislation.

In December 2002, the National Assembly adopted the new Law on Religions, which guarantees equality before the law regardless of religious belonging and religious beliefs. The interference of the state in the internal organization of the religious communities was declared inadmissible.

In the Annual Reports (from 1998 to 2004) on the Bulgaria’s progress towards its EU accession, the European Commission regularly marks that Bulgaria respects human rights and freedoms, and that it fulfills the political criteria for membership, set by the European Council in Copenhagen in 1993 (reports only give recommendations regarding the Roma minority).

2.2. Socio-economic conditions in the South Central Region

According to the Law on Regional Development (State Gazette 2004) Bulgaria was divided into six planning regions¹, of which the fifth (South Central Region – SCR) included districts of Plovdiv, Kardzhali, Haskovo, Pazardzhik, Smolyan and Stara Zagora. In the project, only the three border districts will be examined – Smolian district (SD), Kardzhali district (KD) and Haskovo district (HD). All three are populated by compact groups of Muslims (Bulgarians and Turks).

The three districts of the South Central Region (SCR) under consideration of this report² cover 11,953.9 square km or approximately 11% of the territory of the country, and their population, which lives there counts 581,563 people (or 7.3% of the country's population). The last census, conducted in 2001 (NSI 2001), gives us the following information about the population in the region, taking into consideration three main indicators with relation to self-identification (ethnic belonging, religion and mother tongue): of all residents of SCR (581,563 people), 69.3% identified themselves as Bulgarians (respectively, 34% of the population in KD, 87.6% in SD and 80.9% in HD), and as Turks 28.3% (61.6 % of the population in KD, 4.4% in SD and 11.2 % in HD). On the question about religion, 52.35% declared themselves as Eastern Orthodox, (21.4% of the population in KD, 29.6% in SD and 82% in HD), as Muslims 35.5% (69.6% of the population in KD, 41.9% in SD and 12% in HD), and a relatively high percentage 11.34% (mainly from SD) preferred not to declare their confession. The third indicator – mother tongue – gave the following results: 70.66% said it was Bulgarian (34.7% of the population in KD, 92.2% in SD and 80.9% in HD); 23.8% Turkish (61.53% in KD, 4.1% in SD and 11.3% in HD). Comparison of the data from three indicators leads to the conclusion that the national majority – Christians Bulgarians – represent a majority only in HD, where also a certain percent of Turkish minority lives. In SD, majority of residents are Muslim Bulgarians (Pomaks), considerable number of whom are with latent religious affinity, or preferring not to declare their confession; the second largest group are Christian Bulgarians; a small number of Turks also live in the district (in three villages in the Devin-Dospat area – Borovo, Grohotno and Barutin). In KD, Turks are the majority population (in all the municipalities of the district); second largest group are Christian Bulgarians, and the smallest group are the Muslim Bulgarians – it is possible that insignificant part of this group (around 0.7% identifies themselves as Turks).

The location of the SCR is exceptionally favorable for the trans-border cooperation with Greece and Turkey. Two trans-continental roads, which are of key importance for Bulgaria and Europe, cross on its territory. The first road links western and central Europe with Istanbul (via Sofia, Plovdiv and Svilengrad), and the second connects northern Europe with the Mediterranean (via Ruse, Gorna Oriahovitsa and Haskovo).

The Rhodope mountain occupies the largest part of the SCR. Two of its districts, SD and KD, are entirely located on the territory of the mountain, the former in its central and the latter in its eastern part. The HD, despite touching the northern slopes of eastern Rhodopes, includes also a significant share of lowlands. Diverse landscape influences the specific structure and territorial organization of regional economy, which includes the following branches: agriculture, logging and wood processing, extraction of metal and non-metal ore, metallurgy, light industry and tourism. Depending on the level of economic development, the territory of SCR can be divided into areas of economic growth, areas

¹ The Council of Ministers Decree № 145/27.07.2001 defined six planning regions (corresponding to the level NUTS II of the EU), as basis for planning, execution and monitoring of regional interventions in the decentralized system, consistent with the practice of EU regional policy. Consequently, the regions were regulated with the Law on Regional Development from February 2004.

² For reason of clarity, SCR in this text will refer only to the HD, SD and KD.

of industrial decline, underdeveloped border areas, underdeveloped rural areas, and underdeveloped mountain areas (State Gazette 2004).

Agriculture: Most favorable conditions for agriculture are in HD. Fertile soil, soft climate with strong Mediterranean influence and the presence of water resources are natural preconditions for growing not only the traditional for the region cultures like sunflower, cotton, tobacco, wheat, grapevine, fruit and vegetables, but also for certain cultures, which demand warmer climate and do not grow in other parts of the country (almonds, peanuts, etc.). The altitude in SD varies between 600 and 2,191 meters. A considerable part of the district (70%) is covered with forests, while the arable land represents only 25%. Cultivated areas are located on the slopes of the mountain, on ridges and in river valleys. They are usually divided into small plots and are sometimes far away from the roads. Here most often beans and potatoes are grown, together with the traditional for the area tobacco. Local beans and potatoes are renown in the whole country for their quality. In KD, located on the gentler slopes of the mountain, livelihood of the population is linked above all with the growing of oriental tobaccos. Specific soil of the eastern Rhodopes and the work process, which is completely manual, guarantee the high quality of the local brands.

Stock-breeding (mainly sheep and cattle) is also traditional, especially for mountain areas of SCR. After the democratic changes in 1989, stock-breeding fully became privately owned and is characterized by a high share of small farms. Recently, in HD large stock-breeding farms are being established, equipped with modern technology.

Industry: In all three districts of SCR, deposits of metal ore have been found, and lead, zinc, silver and other rare metal have been extracted. A potential for development of processing industry also exists due to the presence of inexhaustible deposits of non-metalliferous minerals – bentonite, zeolite, perlite, trass, marble, asbestos, etc. Due to unprofitability of the mines (insufficient content of metal in the ore) and to the ecological problems, created by metallurgical factories, many mines and factories in the region were closed in the beginning of the 1990s.

In recent years, light industry (textile, tailoring and milk-processing enterprises, bakeries and sweet shops) has developed well. Due to the proximity of the region to Greece and Turkey, the most common investors are Greek and Turkish entrepreneurs, which set up small tailoring and shoe-making facilities. In border municipalities, there are companies and firms, financed exclusively by the foreign investors.

Recently, the priority in the region became **tourism (eco-tourism)**, due to the existence of a number of favorable natural-geographic, demographic and cultural preconditions for its development. Clean natural environment has been preserved, including spacious forests, rivers, water basins, and unique flora and fauna, and mineral water springs. In addition, the region can offer good facilities, experience and tradition of offering tourist services. Apart from traditional mass tourism, new forms are developing: wine tourism, active tourism (cycling, fishing, horse-riding, and trekking), pilgrimage tourism (visits of holy sites and attendance of religious festivities), alternative and entertainment tourism.

The next indicator of economic conditions in SCR is **infrastructure**, which is relatively well developed, but its overall condition is unsatisfactory. The road network is badly maintained, especially in the mountain areas, where during the winter months, many villages are difficult to be reached and are often left without electricity. Regarding telecommunications, building of new capacities, based on modern digital technologies, is a necessity. The presence of a significant number of natural water resources offers a good base for water-supply infrastructure. In spite of this, numerous villages still do not have a water-supply network and canalization. Additional purification facilities for drinking water have to be built and the aged water-supply network needs to be repaired. Waste waters and solid waste create a serious ecological problem – recently several programs for

their collection and recycling were developed. Regulated rubbish dumps in villages are being built as part of the measures taken for making all populated places cleaner.

In short, the socio-economic situation in the region is characterized, on one side, by the presence of favorable conditions for economic growth (natural resources, qualified and experienced workforce), and on the other, by serious problems. Some of the problems were inherited from the socialist period (mainly regarding the infrastructure and protection of natural environment). The others are a result of slow and painful transition to market economy, sluggish and non-effective privatization, closure of enterprises without taking social measures for providing alternative employment to laid-off workers, low purchasing prices of agricultural products (including the tobacco), dumping import of agricultural products from the neighboring countries (Greece, Turkey and Macedonia), low consumption power of the population, and of underdeveloped regional markets. For these reasons it is very important for Bulgaria to use well the pre-accession funds in order to be able to cover the economic criteria for EU accession.

2.3. Size and types of the EU funds channeled to the South Central Region

Of the three pre-accession instruments, financed by the EU, Bulgaria was most successful in implementing funds from the **PHARE** program. Currently, the following PHARE programs are being implemented in the country: 1) National Program (PHARE–NP); 2) Programs for Trans-Border Cooperation (PHARE–CBC) – the general objective is to promote economic and social cohesion in the CBC region and thus to help border regions to overcome specific development problems stemming from their relative isolation in the national economy, and 3) Programs with numerous beneficiaries.

In the period 1992–2002, the PHARE program assisted Bulgaria with 1.35 billion Euro, and from 2000 to 2003, the average annual financial assistance was around 155 million Euro (for 2001 – 180.8 million). It is difficult to determine how much of these funds went to SCR; however it is clear that the region has been benefiting mainly from the first two programs. In 2000, when the financial memorandum on the PHARE–NP program “Economic and Social Alignment” (ESA) was signed, SCR was one of the priority regions. Projects in the following areas were financed: 1) Human resources development (“Investment in the vocational training infrastructure” – 1.15 M€ for the SCR; “Social Inclusion”); 2) Development of the manufacturing sector (“Technological Grant Line for Small and Medium-size Enterprises”; “High Technology Business Incubators”; “Investment in Business Incubators in Areas of Industrial Decline”); 3) Assisting the development of tourism (“Development of Cultural Tourism”; “Municipal Roads for Access to Tourist Sites of Interest”; “Development of Eco-tourism”).

The PHARE-TBC program was launched in Bulgaria in 1994. The sub-program PHARE–TBC Bulgaria–Greece, which is being implemented along the whole of the natural border between the two countries – the Rhodope mountain, is exceptionally important for the SCR. Priorities for the region according to this program are: transport, environment, communications, economic development, social development and agriculture. Up to now, the following projects were financed on the territory of the SCR: “Rehabilitation, strengthening, and improvement of Road E–85 Harmanli–Svilengrad”; “Construction of Access Road Podkova–Makaza–Makaza Checkpoint”; “Road II–86 Construction of an access road to Cross-border Checkpoint Rudozem”; “Program for Elimination of Uranium Mine Impact in Southern Bulgaria”; “Construction of Three Urban Wastewater Treatment Facilities along the Arda River Basin: Madan, Rudozem and Zlatograd” (400 000 €); “Construction of an optical cable between the city of Haskovo and the Greek border”.

In April 2004, three additional financial memoranda within the PHARE program were signed. Their overall value is 32,120,000 Euro. Two of them fall under the TBC initiative for 2003 (between

Bulgaria and Greece for 20 million Euro). The third memorandum – for 4,120,000 Euro, is the first, which Bulgaria signed under the initiative of the program PHARE – “External borders 2003” in respect to the future external borders of EU (between Bulgaria and Turkey, Serbia and Montenegro, and Macedonia).

The financial memorandum with Greece envisages the continuation of the work on trans-border infrastructure (funds from the program will be used for building the road to the border checkpoint Rudozem–Xanthi) and ecology (project for decreasing the pollution of river Arda, in which ten Bulgarian and Greek municipalities will participate – its value is 46,138 Euro).

The main purpose of the other two programs, from which Bulgaria is receiving funds – **SAPARD**³ and **ISPA**⁴ – is to attain the priorities of Partnerships for accession, the goal of which is to assist the candidate countries to fulfill the membership criteria.

In contrast to the financing through ISPA, which is realized on the governmental level, assistance through SAPARD is intended for individual agricultural proprietors, farmers and municipalities. Bulgaria received 54,128,000 Euro in 2001 through this program, 55.6 million Euro in 2002, and 56.1 million in 2003, but only a small number of projects was realized in SCR (for example, only two projects in KD).

Projects from the ISPA program, which, albeit only partially, are realized on the territory of SCR, are the following: 1) Projects dealing with transport infrastructure (“Reconstruction and electrification of the railway line Plovdiv–Svilengrad–Greek/Turkish border”); 2) Projects in the sphere of environment which are directed mainly towards investments in management of waste waters, canalization systems and water supply, waste management in cities and air pollution (“Collection and treatment of city waste waters and water supply in the city of Smolian” – National sources: 24,5 M€); “Water Sector investment projects for the water companies in six District Centers” (incl. Kardzhali); „Construction of the regional center for waste management–Kardzhali”.

2.4. Socio-economic status of the minority and the majority

After 1989, the political status of the population of SCR experienced positive changes as a result of the commitment of Bulgaria to respect the main international legal obligations for protection of human and minority rights. The changes in the socio-economic situation, however, had ambiguous results. On the one hand, privatization and agrarian reform created favorable conditions for the development of private initiatives. On the other hand, the combination between the traditional underdevelopment of the region (especially in the mountain and border villages) and the rising unemployment (during the first years of the transition, in some villages over 90% of residents were left without work) resulted in sharp impoverishment of the population. The imbalances between supply and demand of work force and between specialization of workers and the market needs became a permanent tendency. Migration has also intensified, although in contrast to the beginning of transition, when migrations were motivated by political factors (mainly among Turks), lately the reasons are economic. A large part of the population (mostly men) was forced to search for the means of livelihood outside the region. Most of them managed to find employment in the sphere of services or as seasonal construction workers in the large cities in Bulgaria or abroad – the main destinations are Spain, Portugal, Germany, Belgium and Holland.

In recent years, successful negotiations of Bulgaria for EU membership brought more optimism into the prospects for the future. The purposeful efforts of the last two governments and of the local

³ Long-term financial agreement, which sets the rules for applying SAPARD, was signed in December 2000.

⁴ Bulgarian Parliament ratified the Memorandum of Understanding on the Utilization of the National Fund for ISPA between the government of Bulgaria and the EU on December 29, 2000.

authorities to revive the economic life in the region through the appropriate investment policy – in which pre-accession EU funds play a significant role, – are beginning to have an effect. Funds are sought for stimulating the employers to hire the unemployed and for optimization of training courses and programs for qualification and re-qualification, including the introduction of alternative systems for vocational training and for qualifications on municipal and regional level.

2.5. Political-administrative institutions and territorial structures in the country and in the South Central Regions

Bulgarian transition to democracy after 1989 begun with the reorganization of the state institutions based on two principles: separation of authorities and republican parliamentary system. This process did not run uniformly – much time was needed to overcome the totalitarian “habit” of uniformity of the authority.

Currently, the political-administrative structure of the executive authorities in Bulgaria is represented by the central institutions (the Council of Ministers, individual ministries, state and executive agencies, commissions and councils) and regional institutions (Regional Councils for Development – RCD, District Councils – DC, Municipality Councils – MC).

Regional authorities combine two principle of governing: state government and local self-government. The institutions, through which central regional policy is conducted, are DC and RCD, which are linked to the administrative-territorial structure of the country. Bulgaria is divided into 28 districts, headed by the district governors, appointed by the Council of Ministers (the district administration is likewise appointed by the state). The districts are distributed into six planning regions. Chairman of the RCD is the district governor of one of the districts, included in the respective region, elected by the council on rotational principle for the period of one year. Members of RCD are representatives of seven ministries (Regional Development and Public Works, Finance, Environment and Water, Agriculture and Forestry, Economy, Labor and Social Policy, and Transport and Communications), appointed by the respective minister, governors of the districts in the respective region, and one representative of municipalities from each district. The main administrative-territorial unit of self-government is the municipality. The municipality administration is elected on the local level following the proportional election system, and is headed by a mayor, elected by a majority system. The municipalities are legal bodies with their own budget and property. The relations between the local and central authorities in Bulgaria, however, are still marked by the problems, caused by the centralized financial and fiscal system, which makes the municipalities somewhat dependent on the state. Recently, several concrete steps for decentralization of governing functions have been taken.

As a result of free election, both minority groups are well represented in the local authorities. On the central level, the Turkish minority is represented in the parliament by the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), which is also a coalition partner of the National Movement Simeon the Second (NMSS) in the government. The MRF, which is supported also by Muslim Bulgarians from KD, holds two ministerial posts in the government and a number of deputy ministers in most ministries. In SD, the largest part of Muslim Bulgarians support the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), which ruled the country during the previous mandate and which started the negotiations with the EU. The current district governor of SD is a representative of Bulgarian Muslim community.

2.6. Important reforms and changes in relation to the implementation of EU structural policy

With the Agenda 2000, the European Commission adopted intensified strategy for preparing the candidate states for membership. Based on this document, in Bulgaria, like in other candidate states, Accession Partnership was signed. In April 2002, the Road Map, which determined the priority areas for cooperation, was also signed. Bulgarian government adopted a National Strategy for Accession to the EU and a National Program for the Adoption of the Acquis Communautaire (NPAA), which set in detail the first steps and actions of the country. The short-term goal was to establish structures, responsible for regional and structural policy. The medium-term goal was the introduction of the legal grounds for smooth transition from pre-accession to structural funds after the entering of Bulgaria into the EU. The increased EU financing and the condition for national co-financing in the frame of stable macro-economic environment made it necessary for Bulgaria to go through with certain changes, so that it could effectively program, manage and control the application of two new (after the PHARE program) pre-accession instruments (ISPA and SAPARD).

In connection with this, the National Program for Development was adopted, similar to the program of EU member-states, which are beneficiaries of the Cohesion Fund. There has been progress also in construction of institutional structures (mainly on the central level) for application of structural policy of the EU – departments Management of EU Funds and the National Fund in the Ministry of Finances were designated respectively as the future managing body and future fund-distributing body for the structural funds. The National Plan for Economic Development (2000–2006) and the National Plan for Regional Development were also set up. The institutional framework for applying ISPA and SAPARD was created. Regarding the control of the pre-accession EU funds and expenditure for structural activities, several changes were made. The Minister of Foreign Affairs was named as the National Aid Coordinator, having the responsibility for the process of programming of all the instruments, financed by the EU and providing the political coordination between the EU and Bulgarian beneficiaries. The Minister of Finance became the National Authorizing Officer (NAO) of the National Fund. The Minister for the Regional Development and Public Works was selected as the National ISPA Coordinator (NIC). A decree of the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry established a Committee for Supervision of SAPARD. The State Fund “Agriculture” is simultaneously the executive and fund-distributing agency for the SAPARD program.

On the central, regional and district level, institutions providing conditions for coordination and partnership were also established. Intensive training of regional and local administration has started (including in KD, SD and HD), based on the long-term program for preparing specialists, well acquainted with the financial instruments of the EU, which will be capable to apply requirements for organizational and financial management of the structural funds.

2.7. Conclusion

- 1) Since the democratic changes in 1989, both the legal mechanisms and the political will to guarantee and respect the human and minority rights of the compact Muslim population (Turkish and Bulgarian) in the border areas of SCR exist in Bulgaria. As a result of the free elections, both groups are well represented in the local government. On the central level, the Turkish minority is represented in the parliament by the MRF, which is also a coalition partner in the government, holding two ministerial posts and a number of deputy ministers. The current district governor of SD is a representative of Bulgarian Muslim community.
- 2) Socio-economic situation in the region is characterized, on the one side, by the presence of favorable conditions for economic growth, and on the other, by serious problems in the sphere

of employment possibilities, conditions for development of private business, infrastructure and protection of natural environment.

- 3) Overcoming the underdevelopment of the region (especially in the border and mountain villages) has recently been in the center of the regional policy of the Bulgarian government. Priority areas for development were defined and the investment policy through European pre-accession funds intensified. So far, the most important were the projects from the PHARE–TBC program.

3. Literature review

The Bulgarian nation was formed even before the liberation from the Ottoman rule in 1878 and in close connection to the national political program, formulated by the Bulgarian intellectuals and political activists, which envisaged setting up of independent cultural and religious institutions first within the confines of the empire and later in an independent state. These circumstances to a large extent predetermined both the policy of the future nation-state and the attitude of the national majority towards the Muslim population remaining on Bulgarian territory under the international treaties between 1878 and 1912. Relatively objective primordial indications for belonging to a nation (Bulgarian language, common (ethnic) origin, traditions, Eastern orthodox religion, and national historical myths) performed the role of common denominators for social cohesion or inclusive/exclusive criteria.

A transfer of this model to the Muslim minorities explains why from the very beginning they were perceived as “unwanted” Ottoman heritage and a source of “strategic insecurity.” Nevertheless, the attitude towards Turks and Pomaks was different. While Turks were seen as a completely “foreign” element, which could not be integrated, Pomaks were viewed as partially “our own,” since they spoke Bulgarian language. This was a reason not only for a differentiated state policy towards the two groups, but also for a different place they occupied in the Bulgarian literature before 1989. A predominant part of research was dedicated to the description and systematization of the knowledge about the language, folklore and customs of Pomaks.

Even in the earliest works the main problem, marking all of the future research, was visible: the contradiction between the Muslim faith of Pomaks and the Bulgarian language they spoke. Zealous collection and publication of folklore and ethnographic materials from the Rhodopes after the liberation was on the one hand a result of the increased interest in the traditional culture and on the other, it became the means for formation and consolidation of the belief that Pomaks are a part of Bulgarian nation. Until the middle of the 20th century, most publications dealing with the Muslim population of the Rhodopes, were work of Christian natives of the Rhodopes, well acquainted with their neighbors, but incapable of expressing the position of the Muslim community itself.

The tradition to examine the Pomak community as a constituent part of Bulgarian nation was continued in the second half of the 20th century, although Bulgarian historic and ethnographic scholarship entered a new stage, characterized by strong ideologizing, nationalism and atheism. Several collections, dedicated to the past and the national culture of the Rhodope population, were published (Kompleksna 1955; Narodnostna 1969). The priority in these and other periodical publications were the common features in the culture of Christian and Muslim Bulgarians. Well-meaning researchers also pointed out the differences, but in general there was a lack of interest towards the religious aspects of the culture of Muslims, as preference was given to archaic, and consequently “authentic” Bulgarian components (for more details see Aleksiev 1997).

At the same time, historians dealing with the history of Bulgarians in the period between 15th and 18th centuries, placed the issue of islamization in the center of their interest. Two main theories about the origin of the Muslim population in Bulgarian lands, and in the Balkans in general, appeared: the theory of Muslim (Turkish) colonization, and the theory of conversion of local (Bulgarian) population to Islam. They were followed by the question about how Islam was spread in the Rhodopes. Attempts to prove the forceful islamization, organized by the Ottoman state (Hristov, Hadzhinikolov 1858: 69–71), received much space, although they were based on oral traditions (Narodnostna 1969: 221–238), a part of which were of questionable reliability, and on chronicles, authenticity of which came under doubt in the 1980s (Todorov 1984; Zhelyazkova 1990b). Undoubtedly, the prolonged support for this view was also a result of the fact that in that period, Bulgarian scholars had no access to the documents in Turkish archives. However, for a long time the theory of forceful islamization has been the prevailing opinion not only in the scientific literature, but also in the popular literature and history textbooks, and as such it has left deep marks in the public consciousness.

Despite the profound intellectual and ideological strain between colonization and conversion theories, they interface on one point: that the converts were part of the already consolidated Bulgarian ethnic group and that by converting to Islam, their Bulgarian ethnicity was weakened or completely obliterated (Todorova 1998: 473). A careful scrutiny of the islamization reveals that, despite the stress regularly being placed on the violence, almost all of the authors recognize islamization as a gradual and protracted process beginning in the 16th century and impossible to reconstruct in all its details (Dimitrov 1965; 1972; Mutafchieva 1994: 9–10), for it was often a result of individual decisions, influenced by a number of economic, psychological and other factors. This view became predominant in the science – although paradoxically – in the years of the so-called “revival process,” when it finally became clear that the existence of deliberate Ottoman policy of forced islamization could not be proven.

In general, however, the scholarly literature always assisted the maintenance and circulation of the national historic myths about Pomaks as “victims” of the merciless islamization policy of the Ottoman empire. Pomaks were thus presented as being forced to accept the religion of the conqueror under the threat of death, or vice versa – they suffered the martyrs’ death, refusing to give up their faith. The principally correct observations that Pomaks spoke Bulgarian language and shared some common cultural features and common origin with Christian Bulgarians were used as a proof that they were a part of Bulgarian nation, and as such were used as an argument for the assimilation policy of the state. The same pattern was used by the Zhivkov regime to deal once and for all with the “Turkish question” in Bulgaria. The ideologists of the “revival process” leaned on the thesis of some Bulgarian historians, who claimed that a large part of Turks were also descendants of Bulgarian, but were in a more advanced stage of assimilation, since they accepted not only the religion conquerors, but also their language. This opinion was met with huge scepticism both within the Bulgarian scholarly community (Dimitrov, 1992) and abroad (Eminov, 1997: 36–37), but publications of “studies,” which offered additional evidence along the same lines of thinking, were hastily prepared (Problemi 1988; Stranitsi 1989).

The assimilation campaign of the 1980s had a crucial effect on both the Turkish minority and Bulgarian society in general. In a paradoxical way, the dramatic events consolidated the future of the democratic process in the country, as the Bulgarian opposition became extremely sensitive to minority issues. In a way – at least to the mid-1990s – the issue of protection of minority rights became one of the pillars of the Bulgarian notion of democratic changes, while nationalism – in Bulgarian language almost always with negative meaning – came to be regarded as a symbol of the communist past.

This was reflected by a new approach in the research of the Muslim communities, characterized by objectivity and critical attitude towards links between history and political and ideological influences of nationalism (Zhelyazkova 1997: 53; Aleksiev 1997: 88–94; Mutaftchieva 1994: 9–11; see details in Anagnostou 2005b). Increased interest in various communities in Bulgaria and their diversity opened two new areas of research. The first was concerned with the issues of peaceful co-existence and possible disagreements and conflicts between different ethnic, cultural and religious communities. The central interest of the second research area were identities. In both cases, the ambition was to realistically present the situation, and for this reason a priority was given to top-bottom approach and field work research, conducted simultaneously by experts from various fields (historians, ethnologists, folklorists, sociologists, political scientists and economists). Result of these efforts were several volumes, which included articles dedicated to the Bulgarian Muslims – Turks and Pomaks (*Aspects of Ethno-cultural Situation in Bulgaria*, 1992; *The Ethnic Situation in Bulgaria*, 1993; *Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria*, 1994), and also books in which results of concrete studies in the Rhodopes were published (*Kardzhali from Tradition to Modernity*, 1998). Recently, Bulgarian scholars pay much attention to one more research area which is closely related to our project – the economic development and future prospects of the regions, populated by minorities/located in border areas.

3. 1. Minority-majority relations

The new research approaches to the contact zones between Bulgarians, Pomaks and Turks made it possible to outline several patterns of coexistence and/or incompatibility between the national (Bulgarian) majority and the Muslim minorities. The conclusion was that otherness was known and acknowledged, and thus it was reduced to being different (the so called “familiar strangeness”, Georgieva 1994: 142–144; Zhelyazkova 1994). Each (ethno)religious community maintained its integrity, which was perceived by other communities as “alien” – through combination of indicators like language, religious norms and religious behavior, cultural model and traditions, own history and/or evaluation of historic events, etc. The researchers had outlined several persistent features each community ascribed to the image of “the other”. For example, Turks saw Bulgarians as people who avoided hard labor, but liked to command; Bulgarians thought of Turks as hard working, smart and skillful, but also hostile, distrustful, treacherous, cruel, ungrateful, and prone to conflicts. Both groups were more favorably disposed towards Pomaks, but Bulgarians had characteristic prejudices also against them – they viewed them as religious fanatics and/or as infidels (Mitev 1994: 180–182; Fotev 2001: 96–132). Almost all respondents stressed the traditionally good relations with their neighbors, but did not fail to add some negative features of “the others,” which in a given moment or in principle could strain the relations between them. Conclusion was that in all cases, negative evaluations had a collective and not an individual character (for example, “Turks are bad, but my neighbor Hasan is a wonderful person”) and were often backed by concrete “historic” or “personal” evidence, clearly defined by juxtaposition of “us-victims” and “them-oppressors.” Each group thus experienced itself in the historic perspective as a “collective hero–martyr,” suffering in the name of its identity (Georgieva 1998b: 20–21).

Traditional mechanisms of coexistence in everyday life were manifested by the maintenance of good neighborly relations and mutual assistance (the so-called system of *komshiluk* – ‘neighborhood’); participation in family festivities; mutual exchange of ritual gifts during religious holidays; common cultivation of space and formation of a common cultural code through popular Christianity and popular Islam. In this way, inter/supra ethnic-confessional local communities were formed on the basis of inclusion/exclusion (Elchinova 1999: 8–93). The coexistence in these communities was regulated by a flexible system of mirror relations, which would provoke tension and

opposition if one of the sides broke the rules (Georgieva 1994: 142–152; Zhelyazkova 1997: 53–54; Ivanova 2000: 72–80).

The main conclusions of the ethnological studies confirmed the hereditary traditional model of coexistence (mutual tolerance stemming from cultural proximity and familiarity with each other). The picture presented by sociological studies, however, was not so optimistic. It painted strong hostility, distrust and fear of Turks, exaggeration of cultural differences, and overestimation of religion as a part of cultural identity. In stereotypes, different religion was viewed as fanaticism, and the conservatism of Muslims – as self-confinement. The ascribed highly negative characteristics were intentionally used as an excuse for social discrimination, especially during the 1980s.

Conclusions, acquired through empirical studies, outlined a cluster of factors with negative influence on the model of coexistence and which could become a source of tension or even cause a possible conflict. (Generally they conform to the areas, more predisposed to conflict, according to M. E. Brown, 1996: 1–31, 571– 601).

The first among these factors was the “revival process” and other aggressive assimilation policies of the Bulgarian authorities, which had preceded it. The consequences for Muslim minorities were terrible – self-isolation, desire for migration and concealment of identity, and creation of a barrier in the relations with the Bulgarian majority (Kalionski 1994: 282–292; Mitev 1994: 180).

Another possible source of conflict was the economic crisis. There was, however, also an opposing view: the main division lines in the Bulgarian society in the period of transition were predominantly social (wealth vs. poverty, inclusion vs. exclusion, etc.), and thus they were neither ethnically predetermined, nor resulted from ethnic discrimination (Ivanov 1996: 5–6). Sociological studies nevertheless showed that higher and persistent unemployment among Turks and Pomaks in the Rhodope region was perceived by the respondents as an act of discrimination, although the real reason was that Pomaks between the ages of 18 and 29 continued to have lower education than Bulgarians of the same age group (Tomova 2000: 171–269).

Paradoxically – or on the other hand, logically – when the relations between the majority and (Muslim) minorities move from the level of everyday contacts to the political level, tolerance seems to be decreasing. Sociological studies showed that the majority was extremely suspicious of the very term ‘minority’ which was generally perceived in ethnic, and not in civic sense (“they are not Bulgarians”). A large part of the society believed that even the use of this term was dangerous, since it did not involve only human, but also political rights and thus could lead to separatist desires (especially when Turks were in question) and to the repetition of the Cyprus scenario (Mutafchieva 1994: 5–35; Nitzova 1997: 729–739; Grekova 2001). The predominant opinion was that it would be best if the Turks were fully integrated into the Bulgarian society – that is, were assimilated (Grekova 2001), or alternatively, if they migrated to Turkey (Mitev 1994: 180–182).

The press without doubt contributed to this state of affairs. Analyses of press materials from 1990s showed that the issue of the so-called internal minorities (on the territory of Bulgaria) was regularly avoided or given much less attention than the issue of external minorities (Bulgarians beyond the borders of the state). A difference was made between ‘Bulgarian nation’ and ‘the Turkish ethnic community’, but the old fears that Turks represented a danger to ‘the national security’ and territorial integrity because they were instruments of Turkey’s influence continued to play a role (Grekova 2001).

The Bulgarian Constitution, adopted in 1991, did not formulate the term ‘minority’. Thus instead of collective rights of the minorities, the Constitution protects the individual rights of every citizen. It guarantees equality and protection from discrimination, including on ethnic grounds. Several of its articles guaranteed to people, belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic communities the right to preserve their culture, to practice their religion and to speak their language. Consequently, there were

no legal obstacles for representatives of ethnic minorities to associate. The institutional base, which should guarantee the protection of these rights, had been set up. In December 1997 the UDF government established the National Council for Ethnic and Demographic Issues within the Council of Ministers (recently renamed into the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues). The council is a state-public institution with the task of coordinating the cooperation between government institutions and NGOs, aimed at the implementation of the national policy on ethnic and demographic issues, and issues of migration. The level of minority rights respect and protection in Bulgaria is monitored by a number of non-governmental watchdogs, concerned with the human rights, and by international organizations. Their reports have in recent years included a number of critical remarks, especially regarding the situation of Roma. Complaints regarding Turks are rare, while Pomaks rarely receive any attention at all, most likely because they do not fall into the category of ethnic minority.

Despite the consensus among the main political parties regarding the protection of minority rights, almost all of the important steps in this direction provoked dissatisfaction among the Bulgarian majority (at least in the beginning of the transition) or a wide public debate. A response to the decision to restore the names of the people, whose names were forcibly changed, and which was taken in the end of December 1989, was a large protest meeting in January 1990 in Sofia. Subject of the public debate became also other religious and cultural rights of minorities, like teaching in Turkish language and studying of the *Quran*. In 1991, the mother tongue begun to be studied in state schools, and in the following years the number of hours, dedicated to it, increased. But when the MRF proposed that Turkish should be introduced as a second language in the army and that it should be made a mandatory school subject, exceptionally negative public reaction brought the initiative to nothing (Nitzova 1997:729–739; Atanasova 2004: 394–397). The news programs in Turkish language, broadcasted by the national TV, were also viewed with disapproval. The same was the attitude towards the manifestation of religious affiliation of Muslims, perceived by the Bulgarian majority as a result of “the activities of Islamic fundamentalism,” brought to Bulgaria by Turkish, Arab and Iranian missionaries, who promote “anti-Bulgarian, anti-European and anti-Christian strategies” (Georgieva 1994: 144, 146).

Sociological studies showed that the public tolerance towards political rights of the minorities was also unsatisfactory even though they were regulated by laws and were respected in practice. Only one half of Bulgarians recognized the right of minorities to participate in the political life and to be involved in government (Mitev 1994: 180–182; Nitzova 1997: 729–739; Tomova 2000: 171–269). In the beginning of the transition, the negative attitude of the majority was channeled towards the MRF, or the “Turkish party” as it was called by its opponents. Political parties – both from the right and from the left – much contributed to promoting such attitudes by using “ethnic” terminology in political debate. Indicative of these tendencies were the attempts to bring under question the constitutional character of the MRF on the eve of the 1992 elections, or the contest around the election of the mayor in the city of Kardzali in 1995 and 1999 (Ivanov 1996: 10; Nitzova 1997: 729–739; Dimitrov 2000: 18–19 Anagnostou 2005a: 90–91; 101–102). Negative ethnic attitudes and even revival of majority nationalism were often felt on the local level and especially in some Turk-dominated municipalities where the Bulgarians were a minority (Atanasova 2004: 400).

The role of the MRF in the political life of Bulgaria was a subject of discussions among politicians and scholars especially in its relation to the ‘Bulgarian Ethnic Model’ – a term, which was introduced in the first years of the democratic transition to designate the nonviolent (political) approach to the issue of minority problems in Bulgaria in comparison to the wars and ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia. According to Bulgarian political scientists the Model was based on two principles: first, on recognition of the inevitable “invisible limits” to minority rights, and second, on the primacy of

the integration into the multiethnic community. In other words, the formula “democracy means self-determination through secession from a multiethnic state” was treated as inapplicable in the Bulgarian case, and the chosen option was “democracy means constitutional guarantees of minority rights in multiethnic communities” (Ivanov 1996: 13).

Leaders of the MRF pointed out their own role as crucial for the creation of this model (Dogan: 39, 44–45), while both the BSP and the UDF ideologists stressed that the Model was based on the traditional tolerance of the Bulgarian society and was a result of joint efforts of all main political parties and of the civil society. They criticised the Movement for unjustifiably claiming to be the only guarantee for the peaceful transition, and that it was trying to keep its own electorate in artificial isolation in order to fortify the positions of its political elite, which abused the Turkish minority for personal goals. During the pre-election campaign in the spring of 2001, a proposition was made that the Bulgarian Ethnic Model should not be viewed as merely a political phenomenon. Instead, it should be understood as a cultural process, as rethinking of the inter-ethnic relations in the context of European integration.

As a matter of fact, the MRF never declared itself as ethnic, and even less so as a separatist party. On the contrary, in the years of transition the Movement acted as a responsible political force and it never called for territorial autonomy. As its leader A. Dogan had stated, the MRF transformed from an ethnic party of a national type into a national party of an ethnic type, and within one year became a member both of the Liberal International and of the European Liberal Party (Dogan: 50). The MRF’s firm control of the minority votes has allowed its leaders to pursue realistic and flexible policies in the defense of the minority’s interests (legal protection in conformity with international law, political rights and participation at all levels of local and government structures, guarantees for Turks’ cultural and linguistic identity). And these interests themselves have not been purely ethnic, and often have been dominated by social-economic concerns (Ivanov 1996: 11; Atanasova 2004: 390).

The analyses of inter-ethnic relations in the country led to the conclusion that in the course of the centuries, several patterns of communication between individuals and communities were set up. These patterns represented mechanisms for prevention of conflicts on the local level, and sometimes they even managed to neutralize the policies and decision, made on the central level and which were potentially dangerous for the peace and coexistence. Yet, at the same time we should not overlook the deep-rooted opinions and stereotypes (prejudices, as human rights protectors call them) about those belonging to a different ethnicity and which continue to be strengthened by the old and new myths. Despite that, it can be said that in the fifteen years of transition situation has definitely changed for the better. Not the least so due to the fact that the problems can now be jointly discussed and pragmatic solutions found.

3.2. The Turkish (ethnic) identity, the Pomak (religious and cultural) identity and the politics of culture and identity

The second main discourse for the Bulgarian researchers after 1989 was the identity problem. On the one hand, the increased scientific interest in that issue represented a reaction against the thesis about the “unified socialist nation,” dominating during the communist regime, and against the leveling of the ethnic differences down to cultural specificities with a narrow scope of display. What is more, the same thesis was used as a “scientific” argument to support the state policy of assimilation. On the other hand, recognition of the right to ethnic and confessional diversity provoked an “outburst” of identities and self-identifications of the various communities in Bulgaria (and in the other CESE countries), which phenomenon should be analyzed as well. The new approach again

presupposed a priority of the empirical research – as it had been in the cases where the parameters of the relations minority-majority had to be clarified. The objective was to establish the way in which the ethnic and confessional communities self-identify themselves instead of commenting these issues from “outside” (in our case the scientific group) according to indications, which despite being objective might not be defining at the same time. Meanwhile it was important to outline the concrete historical and political lines which defined and stimulated/impeded the display of Muslim communities’ identities in Bulgaria.

In the course of their analyses of the issue, most of the experts acknowledge that the Muslim communities on the Balkans have some common characteristics. As a part of the ruling majority within the Ottoman Empire they had been practically excluded from the process of nation-building of the Balkan nations, and when they found themselves in the position of minorities in the newly formed nation-states for sometime these groups retained a fluid consciousness which displayed the characteristics of a *millet* mentality (Todorova 1998: 475; Karagiannis 1999; Anagnostou 2005b). The processes of differentiation and self-identification of Muslim communities took part in conditions of systematic pressure from “above” (exercised by central and local authorities), regardless of the fact if they applied “stick” or “carrot” approach. In the case of Muslims in Bulgaria, the fact that the state policy was different towards Turks and towards Pomaks played an important role. As a result their identities had gone through changes which gradually took them away from the original model of identification according to the confessional belonging. At the end of the 20th century the empirical surveys registered two separate cases: Turkish minority with clearly displayed ethnic identity and Bulgarian speaking Muslims whose identity – according to most of the existing analyses – was too complicated to be marked with a single label.

3.2.1. The Turkish Identity Case

With the exception of the short period of the “revival process”, it seems that no one had ever argued against the identity of the Turkish minority, formulated as a combination of “classic” ethnic characteristics (language, traditional culture, feeling of belonging to the Turkish ethnos) and Islamic confession, which defines two, sometimes mutually hostile groups – the Sunni majority and the Heterodox minority.

The lack of concrete studies does not allow us to make conclusions when and with what pace has the Turkish community developed its identity. It had been suggested that during the Empire time, the Turks in the Bulgarian lands consolidated as a relatively compact ethnic-religious formation (Stoianov 1998: 57), but according to another hypothesis the first changes towards differentiation started even in the beginning of the 20th century when from a ruling majority, they became a minority (Pettigree 1990: 79–88). It is beyond dispute that the unification of the community in the period between the World Wars I and II was enhanced by the religious cultural-educational and sport societies, Turkish schools and newspapers in Turkish language, and the participation of the representatives of the minority in the central and local authorities’ bodies (Stoianov 1998: 57; 68–80).

Still, without any doubt, the greatest influence was exercised by the Kemal Attaturk’s Revolution (1923) which led to the establishment of the Turkish republic and the introduction of a number of reforms aimed at the modernization of the country. The changes assisted the consolidation of the Turkish nation and the transformation of the remnants of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire into a nation-state with Turkish as a basic language and Islam as an official religion. Pan Turkism became a state ideology and a basic tool to attract the Turkish population left outside the borders of the country (Stoianov 1998: 57; 68–80). In Bulgaria the ideas of *Kemalism* spread quickly among the progressive and educated Turkish elite, which begun to raise awareness of belonging to the Turkish nation among the Turkish population of the country. The attempt to establish a Turkish political party – that is,

political representation of the minority – failed due to a coup in the country (1934), which was followed by the abolition of the parliamentary democracy. Alarmed by the rising “Turkish nationalism” the Bulgarian authorities looked for support from the natural opponent of the *Kemalism* – the influential group of *ulema* – which did not approve the reforms in education and the abolition of the Shariah judicial system. The government permanently pursued a policy for resolution of the “Turkish problem” in two directions – restriction of the contacts with the population of the Republic of Turkey and deportation of the progressive Turkish intelligentsia (Stoianov 1998: 83–85).

As a result, Bulgarian Turks, most of whom were poor peasants, closed themselves within their own community, maintaining their traditional way of life (Stoianov 1998: 93). Most probably the dialect and cultural differences between the two basic Turkish groups in Bulgaria – the northern (which uses the so called “Deliorman” dialect) and the southern one (which speaks “Rumeli” dialect, which is nearer to the official Turkish language) – became stable during the period between the two world wars (Ialamov 2002: 56–58). Very likely these processes found their expression in the formation of regional self-consciousness. At the same time, despite the policy of isolation of the Turks from the Bulgarian secular education, Bulgarian language and culture started to penetrate the community (and especially its elite). It is suggested that the same period was the start of the formation of civic consciousness for belonging to the Bulgarian state (Ialamov 2002: 56–58).

After the World War II, when Bulgaria and Turkey were separated by the “iron curtain,” the isolation of Bulgarian Turks from the rest of the world deepened. The political changes in the country – collectivization of the agricultural property, closing of the Turkish schools, atheism – exercised serious influence upon the traditional way of life (Stoianov 1998: 99). The change of the concept of the communist regime about the Bulgarian nation was reflected by the attitude towards the Turkish minority. The first Republican Constitution of 1947 stipulated that “national minorities shall have the right to study their mother language and to develop their national culture, alongside with mandatory studying of the Bulgarian language”, while the Constitution of 1971 did not speak about collective minority rights but about “citizens of non-Bulgarian origin”, who had the individual right to “study their own language as well” (Ivanov 1996: 11; Stoianov 1998: 99, 143). During the following years (1971–1973) the “unified socialist nation” concept was coined and transformed into the ideological basis for the forced assimilation attempts.

On the other hand the Turkish minority enjoyed certain privileges in the economic and educational spheres. For many years the preferential treatment was used to facilitate its integration within the national majority. Still, this preferential treatment led to further isolation and encapsulation of the Turkish population in the peripheral and underdeveloped rural areas (Anagnostou 2005a: 92), while the newly created Turkish intelligentsia was atheistic and “patriotically raised” (Stoianov 1998: 133). Its education and understanding made the group inclined to cooperate with the local cultural and party elite, comprised mainly by representatives of the majority, many of whom had responded to the appeal of the Party to “reinforce the Bulgarian and Party presence” in the underdeveloped border regions, where the majority of the inhabitants belonged to minorities.

Thus, the cultural, economic and social policy of the communist regime stimulated the formation of Turkish ethnic minority, which was characterized with clear self-consciousness, regional economy and territorial characteristics. (Anagnostou 2005a: 92–93). A “Pro-Bulgarian” political (CParty) elite was created, which differed sharply from the majority, which remained closed within the borders of the family. The conclusion is that the community encapsulated itself in order to preserve its Turkish and Muslim identity. Yet it is unclear to what extent the feeling of belonging to the territory was related to Bulgarian civil self-consciousness (Zhelyazkova 1998b: 382–390).

The “revival process” became the catalyst which mobilized, radicalized and politicized the Turkish minority. As a result of the forced assimilation attempts most of the Turks began to identify

themselves along ethnic and national lines. In addition, probably for a first time, they felt the open support of their “kin state” and of the international community (Ivanov 1996: 10; Zhelyazkova 1998b: 381; Anagnostou 2005a: 96). The fall of the communist regime found the Turkish community united and with clearly defined political, social and economic interests. As it was pointed, these interests were expressed by the MRF and the new political situation contributed to the protection of their interests. The majority stopped to perceive the Turkish minority as a part of the Bulgarian nation as well (Zhelyazkova 1998a: 31), although the negative stereotypes continued to exist to some extent.

“The Great Trip” and the subsequent migration of the Turkish population (mainly in direction of Turkey) opened a new field for research – the issues of social and cultural adaptation of the emigrants (the results were published in *Between the Adaptation and Nostalgia. The Bulgarian Turks in Turkey*, 1998). A dissertation “Ethno-cultural Identity of the migrated Bulgarian Turks” (2004) was written. The basic conclusions of the research were that although Bulgarian Turks adapted easily in their own motherland, they developed a ‘trans-state’ identity (Maeva 2004: 210, 212) and possessed hierarchical consciousness, whose levels (Sunni – Kizilbash/Bektash; Turks – Bulgarian/Pomak/Gypsy etc.; Bulgarian Turk – Local Turk) came into effect in correspondence with the specific situation, while the ethnic mark dominates the other ones.

3.2.2. The Case of Pomak Identity

The last statement – that the ethnic mark dominates in the process of the self-identification of the group – is definitely incorrect with regard to the Pomaks. The results of field studies, substantiated by the data from the first census carried out after the democratic changes (1992), showed that some of Pomaks self-identify themselves as Turks, others as Bulgarians, while a significant part of them avoided a direct answer in relation to their ethnicity and preferred to self-identify themselves along religious lines as “Muslims” (cf. Kalionski 1993: 122–130; Konstantonov 1997). The three basic types of self-identification of the Pomaks had been registered by many Bulgarian and foreign scholars, which created the ground for discourse about the ‘Pomak dilemma’ (Kalionski 1993), ‘crisis of identity’ (Elchinova 1999; Anagnostou 2005b) and the ‘contested identity’ (Brunnbauer 1999). Many scholars distinguished the ‘ascriptive’ identity from the ‘self-identity’ of the group (cf. Todorova 1998: 484); and even ideas about the ‘ethnic marginality’ as a basic characteristic of the Pomaks’ ethnicity appeared (Karagiannis 1997: 31).

This evident insecurity in the self-identification of the group was displayed also by the absence of commonly acknowledged self-designation – all names such as ‘Pomaks’ and ‘Bulgarian Mohammedan’, including those with narrower, local use (‘ruptsi’, etc.), were perceived by the majority of the group as imposed from outside and therefore potentially insulting or symbolizing unwanted relation or separation from the group of the Bulgarian Christians (Georgieva 1994: 142). In fact, this was one of the explanations why Bulgarian scientists avoided the use of the term ‘Pomaks’ – the main one being that they were unwilling to accept the existence of a separate (non-Bulgarian) Pomak identity, – though some held that it was the only term which described the group properly (Balicki 1999: 127).

Fieldwork showed that identification behavior of the Pomaks on individual and sometimes on group level varied in accordance with the specific situation. The fear of not being accepted or understood had lead to the creation of flexible strategies for adaptation to the expectation of the other party. A typical example was the use of Muslim names in intra-group communication and of Bulgarian ones in contacts with the majority, especially in cases of administrative institutions, hospitals etc. Brunnbauer defined this behavior as a manifestation of ‘multiple context-sensitive identities’ (Brunnbauer 1999: 36–39), and Karagiannis spoke about ‘situational switching’ and ‘polytaxis’, which he defined as “a constant changeover of symbolic link” and “the capacity to keep

in latency different orders". He believed that viewed from that perspective the ethnic marginalization of the Pomaks did not necessarily cause psychological stress (Karagiannis 1999).

Usually experts pointed that the reason for this situation was the external pressure exercised by the two groups with clearly manifested identity – Turks and Bulgarians – and especially the assimilation policy of the Bulgarian state. The constant and systematic efforts of the Bulgarian authorities to impose Bulgarian identity on Pomaks were not fruitless. The community experienced a deep feeling of insecurity because, unlike Turks, it could not rely neither on the Bulgarian majority, which was convinced that the actions of the government were correct at least in a long term perspective, nor on support from external powers. Similarly to the Turkish minority, Pomaks deliberately isolated themselves from the majority; they did not participate in the migration flows from village-to-city in the industrialization period, which contributed to the preservation of traditional (pre-industrial) and specific characteristics of their culture (Brunnbauer 1999; Georgieva 1998a: 298; Karagiannis 1997: 41–44). At the same time an opposite trend existed as well, because especially the young generation influenced by the secular education, wanted to detach from the religious conservatism and to establish closer contacts with the majority. In the same way as it happened with Turks, Pomaks formed an educated and related to the administration and the Party elite, which at the end of the day broke loose of its roots. Despite the existence of such trends, the beginning of the transition period found the Pomaks almost totally isolated, and politically, socially and economically divided (Todorova 1998: 475).

Some specific forms of participation of Pomaks in the social discourse during the years of the transition, could be viewed as consequence of the policy of repressions and of the negative attitude of the majority. The first form was the voluntary return of some of the Pomaks to the Christian religion. This christianizing campaign was initiated by father Boian Saraev, who was a Muslim by origin and a founder of the Movement for Christianity and Progress ("Ioan Predtechia"). According to him, the change of religion was the only solution for the problem of the Pomak identity which he called 'national hermaphroditism' (Saraev 1996). The beginning of his campaign attracted the attention of the media and it was obviously supported by a significant part of the majority. Probably his followers wanted to achieve effective change of social categorization and full merger with the dominating group (Todorova 1998: 483). But the results were contradictory – division among the generations, tensions between proselytes and Muslims, etc.

A second specificity characterizing the years of transition was not only the absence of separatist movements, but also the lack of pronounced political mobilization within the Pomak community (Todorova 1998: 475). The only attempt for creation of a "Pomak party" (the Democratic Labor Party, registered in 1993) by the mayor of Zhaltusha (a Kardzhali region village) – Kamen Burov, was a complete failure. Burov tried to unite his community around the name 'Pomaks' and after having visited a seminar on ethnic diversity in the USA he came back with the idea about 'Pomak minority', but did not manage to gather enough followers (Todorova 1998: 485–496). The reasons were the lack of internal integration of the community on the one hand, and once again the attitude of the majority and the political powers, on the other. Even UDF, the natural champion of the rights of the minorities in the beginning of the transition, changed its liberal views with regard to the minorities' issues, when it became a ruling party in the end of 1990s. The statement of G. Tahir – the leader of the faction which separated from the MRF in 1997 – that in fact there was a Pomak ethnos, was met by the then Prime Minister Ivan Kostov with the words: "There is no Pomak nation and all such wavering in the area of politics we shall meet with icy calmness" (cited as in Konstantinov 1999). It seems that the change of the UDF position was caused mainly by the current political situation on the Balkans and by the Kosovo crisis, because approximately at the same time the

understanding of the Bulgarian ethnic model was changed to “democracy without separatism” (see above).

Hence, even after the democratic transition factors, which rather hampered than stimulated the processes of self-identification of the Pomak community along national and political lines, obviously prevailed. The group interests of Pomaks were seemingly focused on the manifestation and the preservation of their religious and cultural rights, on the one hand, and on the improvement of their economic situation, on the other.

The reluctant attitude of the community towards its own ethnic identity induced the specialists in the field – both Bulgarian and foreign ones – to agree that at the moment the Pomak’s identity was not only fluid but in a process of formation as well. Most of the scholars also shared a critical viewpoint with regard to historical works created before 1989, which overestimate the significance of some factors (language and/or common origin) and underestimate that of others (religion) in order to prove that Pomaks were an inalienable part of the Bulgarian nation. There were also critiques against the methodology, since identity was considered once given and forever unchangeable (Todorova 1998: 486–487; Brunnbauer 1999: 36–40, 48). Actually, nowadays, there are fewer and fewer critics of the short and clear “historical” definition of the Pomaks proposed by the British expert H. Poulton: “The Bulgarian Muslims (i.e. the Pomaks) are a religious minority. They are Slavic Bulgarians who speak Bulgarian as their mother tongue, but whose religion and customs are Islamic” (Poulton 1994: 111). This definition is equally welcomed by Bulgarian, Balkan and Western scholars. Still, when the issue is the ethnicity of the group, the situation becomes more complicated and the theoretical conclusions are diverse.

Thus, for example, many authors agreed that the Pomaks had for a long time preserved traces of the Ottoman *millet* system, and due to that the preferred self-definition was ‘Muslim’, equated with ‘Turkish’. One of the supporters of this thesis, A. Velinov, was convinced that until the beginning of the 20th century Pomaks did not have Bulgarian identity and considered themselves as Turks, since they continued to think in pre-modern categories of religious belonging (Velinov 2001: 70). Having in mind the loyalty to the Ottoman Empire demonstrated by Pomaks during the suppression of the April uprising in 1876, and the riots in Eastern Rumelia during the period 1878–1886 this suggestion seems logical. At the same time it is hard to accept the idea that the reaction of the community to the assimilation policy of the state during 1930s and 1940s and during the communist regime was “Turkish” oriented and thus preserved the “pre-modern Ottoman identity” until the beginning of the 21st century (Velinov 2001).

The instability of the group gave grounds for E. Karagiannis to deny totally the existence of a “Pomak community”, because it could be described only from “outside” with negative determinants and ‘ascribed’ identities. According to him, Pomaks were divided in two ‘ethclasses’: the Muslim industrial workers in the villages and the atheistic or secular intellectuals of the towns. In addition, Karagiannis tried to offer a more flexible system of self-identification of the Pomaks which consisted of six options: three ‘assimilative’ (Christian Bulgarian, secular Bulgarian, secular Pomak); and three ‘dissimilative’ (Bulgarian Mohammedan, Muslim Pomak, Turkish), which in his opinion started to appear after the changes and to develop during the economic crisis, mainly within the ethclass of the Pomak workers (Karagiannis 1997: 35, 60, 119).

Thus, most researchers preferred to debate over the identity variants, suggested by the community: ‘Turkish–Bulgarian–Muslim/Pomak’ identity, concentrating mainly on the ethnic characteristics of the identity, or they expected that Pomaks should declare a specific identity – a mistake E. Karagiannis cautioned against (Karagiannis 1999). No one questioned the enhanced interest of Pomaks to religion after 1989, but the related explanations were generally negative. Thus, some considered this as a reaction against the limited religious practices imposed in the past (Todorova

1998: 485; Ivanova 2000); others took it as an attempt of creating a specific identity of community's own, yet again serving as a counterpoint to the Turkish/Bulgarian identity imposed from the outside (Mitev 1994: 182; Brunnbauer 1999: 39, 46; Anagnostou 2005a), or as a mechanism of community surviving, which occasionally could result in identification conflicts between the generations (Elchinova 1999: 8–93).

The feeble interest in the religious identity could to a certain extent be explained by the view, dominating in the scientific circles, that Pomaks were deeply religious but had not built up knowledge of their religion, or that they did not even profess the Sunni Orthodoxy, but traditional or popular Islam (Karagiannis 1997: 8). The false thesis of Christian-Muslim syncretism was also discussed (Velinov 2001). These impressions mainly resulted from the lack of serious research into the Muslim communities in Bulgaria (Gradeva, Ivanova 1998: 9–53), which opened a possibility of applying over-simplified definitions both to the community and its religiousness.

Recently the theory of Ts. Georgieva has been well-accepted among Bulgarian scholars. In her opinion a part of the population in the Rhodopes perceived themselves as 'Muslim Bulgarians', an attribute that completely corresponded to the connotations of the term 'Pomaks'. The connection between the ethnic and confessional components in culture was absolutely real and logical to them and the intermediation was not perceived as an instability or demerit. The thesis of the author is that the tendency of combining the Bulgarian ethnic identity with the Muslim religious identity as is the case with the Muslim Bulgarians is expressed in fostering and demonstrating a local traditional culture (Georgieva 1998a: 304–305). And yet, having in mind that the Pomaks do not share the same historical myths with the Bulgarian majority – actually they assess the historical events of Modern history from a different point of view, – and that their culture is Islamic, the issue of 'the Bulgarian ethnicity' of the Pomaks continues to be disputable.

The idea of creating a new 'European identity' and of Europe as an 'imagined community' of 'national type' has given rise to much debate recently. The research conducted in the areas on both sides along Bulgarian-Greek border, inhabited by Pomaks, showed that the idea of European identity started to be viewed as an alternative to the deadlock in the identity of the community.

The conclusions of D. Mihail on the identification conduct of Pomaks in the region of Xanthi was that the only generally accepted definition of identity was the idea of their local origin, including blood kinship, language, religion and customs (Mihail 2003: 255). The locality had been turned into a means of avoiding discussions on ethnic identity and was a response to the state policy. Pomaks of the region have thoroughly opposed to the Greek, Turkish and Bulgarian national etiquette and have promoted the idea of 'European identity' (Mihail 2003: 256–258) and the importance of being 'European', even though in relation to economic and social perspectives mainly (Mihail 2003: 260–262).

Similar research was conducted in the Rhodopes (in SD) to establish whether and to what extent the notion of Europe/EU could turn out to be a symbolic center to the peripheral regions of the nation-state, as well as whether in combination with the ideology of 'Europe of regions' a new type of regionalism, beyond the level of the nation-state, could be identified. P. Kabakchieva discussed several types of identities: local (pre-modern), ethnic, religious, national and regional – she defined the latter as "a notion of community determined by common local identity whose symbolic centre is beyond/above the borders of the respective nation-states". The working hypothesis was that the focus on the new supra-national symbolic centre Europe/EU had prompted the formation of supra-national regional identities, especially in local regions with weak national identity and peripheral vis-à-vis the national centre. P. Kabakchieva believed that it is the local identity that predominated in the Rhodopes (all population groups identified themselves as 'inhabitants of the Rhodopes', while the

ethnic identification was not important and the religious one – called in question); hence conditions existed for it to develop into a regional (supra-national and European) identity (Kabakchieva 2003).

3. 3. Economic activities and regional development

The issues of economic development and future prospects of the regions, populated by minorities or located in border areas, have recently received much attention in scholarly works and in public sphere. The reasons for this attention are on the one hand, the changes, which have occurred in Bulgaria due to its expected EU accession, and on the other hand, the fact that these regions have been the most affected by the economic crisis in the country during the 1990s. The regular Annual Reports of the European Commission on the progress of Bulgaria noted that the Turkish minority was integrated into the political life of the country through elected representatives on the national and local level. However, further efforts are still needed for social-economic integration of ethnic Turks and other minorities, populating the economically underdeveloped (Report 2004).

Most of the publications, related to the issue of economic development, were again a result of field research and included expert analyses of the situation and recommendations for appropriate policies. Several research projects were conducted with the objective to draw the attention of local and central authorities to the need for a comprehensive program for development of the region, adapted to the local resources and population, and to the programs of the ARM (the Association of Rhodope Municipalities), non-governmental organizations and others. They represented a good and clearly defined basis for future activities, linked to the management and implementation of the EU pre-accession funds. Among them it is worth to mention the following: *The Rhodope Mountains – the Pains of the Transition* (1998); *The Agrarian Reform, Regional Development and Business Opportunities in Regions with Ethnically Mixed Population* (1999); *The Social Profile of the Ethnic Groups in Bulgaria* (2000), *Problems and Prospects of the Development of the Eastern Rhodopes* (2002); *Emigration Patterns in the Rhodope Mountains* (2002).

The main conclusions were that the economic crisis was sharper in the regions with mixed population and that its features included economic stagnation, mono-cultural agriculture (raising tobacco) on small plots, undeveloped infrastructure, higher than average for the country level of unemployment, and pauperization of the larger part of population (Tomova 1998: 19–20; Bebelevkova 1998: 45–46).

The process of restitution of the pre-1946 land ownership put the Muslim population at disadvantage. Bulgarians historically possessed more land, which was usually situated on more fertile and flat areas. The land owned by Turks and Pomaks as a rule was eroded, deforested or insufficient to provide for a living. Thus agriculture was not a viable solution to poverty and unemployment in southern Bulgaria. Tobacco production that provided the basic means of living for more than half of the Muslim population in the Rhodope mountains suffered severe crisis. Since 1991 tobacco production decreased several times. The state firm that was a monopolist in this area – *Bulgartabak* ('Bulgarian tobacco') – reduced the purchasing prices and delayed payments for years (Atanasova 2004: 402–403).

There were no signs in the 1990s of an economic uplift or sustainable revival of the local economy in the Rhodopes. The structural reform made things worse because most of the mining and processing enterprises in the south were closed down, thus increasing the already high levels of unemployment among Turks and Pomaks. The process of privatization of state enterprises has been very slow and the development of private businesses negligible. A slight improvement was observed only in those municipalities where revival of enterprises and interest towards private businesses occurred. More often, however, there was a lack of initiative, information and clear strategy for starting a private business. Local people viewed private initiative as a survival strategy, not as means for increasing

revenues. They obviously preferred small businesses with minimum investment risk – mostly trade (Kopeva, Mihailov 1999). The few foreign companies (mostly textile – Greek in Western Rhodopes and Turkish in Eastern Rhodopes) had created new problems, instead of solving the issue of high female unemployment: longer working hours, lack of social insurance and wages which were even lower than the minimal wage defined for the country. This led to further dissatisfaction with the local and central authorities (Tomova 1998: 23).

Similar social-economic conditions in the Rhodopes did not lead to serious stratification of the population. However there was a certain inequality in the social-economic status of the different ethno-cultural groups (e.g. Turks and Muslim Bulgarians), which was visible when compared with the average levels for the country (Tomova 1998: 27). The conclusion was that unemployment and underprivileged position on the labor market of the Turkish population were a consequence of economic difficulties in the employment spheres, traditionally occupied by the Turks, and in the regional disproportions. Hence the social isolation and limited access of the population to education, culture, politics and other spheres of public life. The concrete recommendations were: practical implementation of the envisaged rights of the Turkish population with the aid of expert teams, working in partnership with representatives of the community (Noncheva 2000).

The migration behavior of Turks and Pomaks due to unemployment, low standard of living, and limited possibilities for personal and professional development was another important research issue. But despite the high level of emigration and the tendency among the young (up to 30–35 years of age) to permanently settle abroad, it is difficult to speak about persistent emigration patterns (Karamihova 2003: 80).

The researchers pointed out that the problems of the economic development of districts with mixed population have to be solved with the help of the special programs and strategies for development. Investments in the regional infrastructure were also important (Kopeva, Mihailov 1999; Dimitrov 2002: 75–78). The construction of the necessary border check-points should be accelerated. Another recommendation was to boost the concrete projects and to stimulate a larger interest on the side of Greece (Gadev 2002: 87–91). Some of the authors recommend a policy of giving loans to small and medium-size enterprises in the region, and of linking the production with the market capacities. Another important recommendation was to promote local, municipal initiatives, which consider the specific features, instead of leaning on decisions, made on the central level (Atanasov 1998: 52–54).

The development of regional institutions in connection with the implementation of the EU funds is a relatively new research field for Bulgarian scholars. Lately these issues have been examined in the studies of A. Dzholdzhov and V. Marinov who specialize in the sphere of regional policies and regional development. In the book “Regional Policy in the Process of EU accession” (1998) they represented a comparative analysis of the experience and practice of several countries (EU member-states and accession countries), which have accomplished the institutionalization of the regional development. The study presented also the EU requirements towards Bulgaria, the EU regional policy and some interesting ideas about the possibilities for utilization of structural funds and respective instruments in the pre-accession period (Dzholdzhov, Marinov 1998). Object of analysis in the second book by the same authors (“Regional Policy in Bulgaria: State, Assessment and Perspectives”, 2001) were specific problems of Bulgarian regional policy. The authors believe that the inter-regional differences between district and municipal authorities in the planning regions, and the relations “center/periphery” in the border areas, rural areas and areas with high concentration of minorities, lead to creation of “pockets of poverty,” migration, etc. In the early 1990s, the reforms and the consolidation of institutions were conducted on the national level and rarely took the regional aspect into consideration. At the same time, regional authorities and private business were not engaged and

were limited by the lack of resources and skills. The requirements of the EU regarding regional policy, were sometimes contradictory in concrete stipulations, not clear enough and changing due to the development of the policy for social-economic rapprochement. There was also another controversial approach, not accepted by some experts: the priority of the national growth over the decrease in the regional and district differences (Marinov 2001: 5–16). If the balance was not found between the policy of assisting the underdeveloped regions and of stimulating areas for growth, there was even a danger of Bulgarian regional policy ceasing to be “regional” (Dzhildzhov 2001: 84).

The necessity for establishing qualified administrative units for the realization of the EU programs has also been mentioned (Marinov 2001: 22). The topical issue of decentralization of the management of structural funds and pre-accession instruments of the EU was also discussed. World Bank Development Report 1999/2000 recommended that this principle should be respected, but by taking into consideration local political traditions. Another important issue was the financing of the district plans for regional development predominantly from the national sources, since the revenues of the municipalities were limited and formed on the centralized level, which made the municipalities unreliable partners for co-financing of the projects (Marinov 2001: 38). But on the other hand, the expert evaluation showed that the Bulgarian municipalities have greater freedom of action in the sphere of economy compared to other European countries, which was a good precondition for the expansion of their jurisdiction in the area of regional development (Dzhildzhov 2001: 90).

However, Bulgarian scholars do not consider and comment on the concrete cases of management and implementation of the EU funds and on their relations with the protection of human and minority rights. One of the possible explanations is that the pre-accession programs ISPA and SAPARD started only in the end of 2000. The work of journalists was in this respect both quicker and more appropriate. They have been informing the public on the problems of implementation of the funds and were presenting concrete data and numbers. The media thus highlighted the problems of enterprises, which can acquire funds from pre-accession programs ISPA and PHARE only through mediators like the Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises. This, together with the necessary condition that the state co-finances a project, makes the task of the enterprises more difficult (Aneva 2002: 17; Kostadinov 2002: 1, 7). The press also alarmed the public that in the period 2000–2002, only 19.8% of funds were implemented from SAPARD. A partial explanation for this was that the program subsidized only one half of the investment, and the agricultural proprietors had to take bank loans at their own risk. The reports also showed that the majority of projects were small, mostly for purchasing combines and tractors (Aneva 2002: 16). Another reason for the unsatisfactory implementation of the funds were the complicated rules and procedures of the European Commission, which had to be strictly followed, while the Bulgarian administration was still learning how to manage projects. Another problem was the lack of good coordination between various ministries, which executed and coordinated the implementation of the funds (Vasileva 2002: 20; Aneva 2002: 16).

The issues of regional politics and the relations between local/central governments were discussed also on political level. Seemingly disputes were oriented toward practical questions like the need to restructure the local economy and to support private business. The local authorities in the SCR also expected the enforcement of old degrees that guaranteed privileged status of border and mountain regions (Atanasova 2004: 400). Virtually the controversy was between two opposing strategies for the economic reform. On the one hand, the MRF sharply criticized the “nomenklatura” privatization of BSP-governments in early and mid-1990s, based on the old state-centralized model and nationalism in minority inhabited regions. On the other hand, the Movement’s disapproval of the top-bottom agrarian reform of the first UDF government (1991–1992) became the main reason for its collapse. Further in the course of the 1990s the dispute between the MRF and the UDF over the regional

dimensions of economic reform led to an open conflict. The UDF approach was premised on a uniform nation-wide strategy of fast privatization of enterprises and state withdrawal from economy, while the MRF insisted on regionally-specific strategy in which the central state should assist economic development of peripheral municipalities (Anagnostou 2005a: 100–103). The last parliamentary crises from February 2005 in Bulgaria was also due to the differences of opinion between the MRF and its coalition partner – the National Movement Simeon the Second (NMSS) about the privatization of the state monopolist *Bulgartabak*.

Another tangible issue, which sometimes represented a real challenge for the relations of the MRF with the NMSS was the management of the EU pre-accession funds. The MRF leader A. Dogan had put forward Movement's own development strategy for the ethnically mixed regions (Anagnostou 2005a: 102) and even expressed opinion against the comprehensive management of funds (specifically from SAPARD) by the Ministry of Finances and the specialized National fund. According to him, better solution would be if the management was taken over by appropriate ministries, for example of Agriculture and of the Regional Development and Public Works (Aleksandrova 2002: 27). (Currently, the Minister of Agriculture and one of the Deputy-Ministers of Regional Development and Public Works are representatives of MRF).

4. Conclusion

Since the beginning of the democratic reforms in 1989 and especially after Bulgaria accepted the standards of human rights and minority protection, which had developed over the past fifteen years in conjunction with the Council of Europe, Bulgarian literature on Muslims minorities stepped out of the vicious circle of imposing the views of the national majority on the history and identity of Muslim Bulgarians and Turks. New areas of research appeared, the following three being the most important: 1) the peaceful co-existence and/or possible disagreements and conflicts between the Bulgarian majority and Muslim minorities; 2) the issue of identities – practically never discussed before because of the predominating theory of the “unified Bulgarian nation”; and 3) the problems of the transition from state regulated economy to market economy and prospects and difficulties in the implementation of EU pre-accession funds, largely discussed both in scholarly literature and in mass media. The new areas of research required new approaches with the ambition to realistically present the situation. For this reason, the priority was given to top-bottom approach and field work research, conducted simultaneously by experts from various fields (historians, ethnologists, sociologists, political scientists and economists). The results of these efforts led to the following conclusions:

1) The analyses of the empiric data about the **minority–majority relations** in the country made it possible to outline a specific model for the system of coexistence in the contact zones between Bulgarians, Pomaks and Turks. In the course of the centuries, several patterns of communication between individuals and communities were set up. These patterns represent mechanisms for prevention of conflicts on the local level, and sometimes they even manage to neutralize the policies and decision, made on the central level and which are potentially dangerous for the peace and coexistence.

At the same time the deep-rooted opinions and stereotypes about those belonging to a different ethnicity, which continue to be strengthened by the old and new myths should not be overlooked. The complex system of co-existence, however, is traditionally established mainly in everyday contacts and on personal and local level. The negative stereotypes predominate in the relations between the majority and the minorities and acquire the form of ethnic/religious intolerance and fear of historical counter reaction, which explains the negative attitude of the majority to the religious, cultural and particularly the historical rights of the minorities. And yet, in the past fifteen years of transition the situation has changed for better, at least because of the fact that the problems are generally discussed

jointly and in political terms. The majority are getting used to the loss of their privileged political status and the top-bottom measures for human rights protection, learning to take them up pragmatically, as a legal guarantee not only for the interests of the minorities, but for their own interests as well.

2) The research work on the issue of the **identities of Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks** led to the conclusion that in both cases there were concrete historical and political lines which defined and stimulated/impeded the display of their identities. The processes of differentiation and self-identification of these communities took part in conditions of systematic pressure from central and local authorities, regardless of the fact if they applied “stick” or “carrot” approach. In the case of Muslim communities in Bulgaria, the fact that the state policy was different towards Turks and towards Pomaks played an important role. As a result their identities have gone through changes which gradually distanced them from the original model of identification according to the confessional belonging. At the end of the 20th century the empirical surveys registered two separate cases: a) Turkish minority with clearly displayed ethnic identity and hierarchical consciousness of belonging to a group whose levels (Sunni–Kizilbash/Bektash; Turk–Bulgarian/Pomak/Gypsy etc.; Bulgarian Turk–Turkish Turk) come into effect in correspondence with the specific situation, while the ethnic mark dominates the other ones; and on the contrary, b) Pomaks generally prefer to self-identify themselves along religious lines as ‘Muslims’ while in relation to their ethnicity they are dubious and display ‘multiple context-sensitive identities’ (Brunnbauer), or apply the strategy of ‘situational switching’ (Karagiannis). Most of the experts agree that at the present moment the Pomak community is not united with regard to its identity, which is fluid and in a process of formation, and yet they expect the group to self-identify itself along positive ethnic lines. After 1989 most Bulgarian researchers agree with the theory that the majority of the group perceive themselves as ‘Muslim Bulgarians’, and that there is a constant tendency of combining the Bulgarian ethnic identity with the Muslim religious identity, which is expressed in fostering and demonstrating a local traditional culture (Georgieva). Yet, albeit the term ‘Muslim Bulgarian’ seems quite acceptable to Pomaks, they evidently do not understand it in ethnic terms – the opposition ‘us–them’ is prevailing in relation to the majority. They determine their culture as ‘Islamic’, and still share historical memories and estimations of historical facts which are quite opposite to the historical myths of the majority. Recently, the idea of creating a new (regional supra-national and European) identity is discussed as means to overcome the contradictions between problematic local (religious, ethnic, etc.) identities – and such is evidently the case with the Pomak community on both sides of Bulgarian–Greek border – and the ‘imagined’ national identification.

3) Recent scholarly research and press publications on **economic development and future prospects** of the three districts (Haskovo, Smolian and Kardzhali) and their participation in the implementation of pre-accession funds, outlined a set of specific problems and tried to propose adequate solutions for improving the present situation. They could be summarized in three points:

a) **Assessment of Problems/Favorable conditions.** The economic crisis is sharper in the highland border regions with mixed population. The social-economic situation there is characterized by economic stagnation, high level of unemployment, mono-culture type of agriculture on small plots, underdeveloped infrastructure and pauperization of the larger part of the population. The result is social isolation and limited access to education, culture, politics and other spheres of public life. Despite the high level of emigration for economic reasons and the tendency among the young people to permanently settle abroad, the emigration is mostly viewed as temporary work abroad.

b) **Weak points in local/regional/central policies.** From the early 1990s the high level of centralization (institutional, economic and financial) has been assessed as the main obstacle for the development of local/regional economic policies. All the important reforms and the construction of

new institutions were conducted on national level for a long time and rarely took the regional aspect into consideration. As a result regional and local authorities were not engaged and were limited by the lack of resources and skills. In the economic development the priority was the national growth over the decrease in the regional and district differences. Recently the problem has also been the lack of coordination between various ministries, which execute and coordinate the implementation of the pre-accession funds. However, the weak points of central policy had often been explained by the fact that some requirements of the EU regarding the regional policy were contradictory in concrete stipulations, not clear enough and changing due to the development of the policy of social-economic rapprochement. The slow rate of implementation of pre-accession funds on local level is due to red-tape and the mediation of formal institutions like the Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises. This circumstance is further aggravated by the stipulation that the state should co-finance each project; the complicated rules and procedures of the European Commission, which have to be strictly followed, while the Bulgarian local and regional administration is still learning how to manage projects, also seems to be a serious problem. Low interest to pre-accession programmes (especially SAPARD) among local contractors also have reasonable explanation: the program subsidizes only a half of the investment, and the agricultural proprietors have to take bank loans at their own risk. That is why they can afford only small-scale projects. Often there is a lack of initiative, information and clear strategy for development of private business.

c) **Solution of the Problems/Expert Recommendations.** The decentralization of the management of pre-accession instruments of the EU seems to be the most adequate solution, yet the experts warn that the decentralization could endanger the macroeconomic stability in the country. Another important recommendation is to increase investments in regional infrastructure and accelerate the construction of the necessary border check-points. Yet those measures alone will by no means help to overcome the historically inherited economic and ethno-cultural marginalization of the region. The necessity for establishing qualified administrative units for the realization of the EU programs should also not be neglected.

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**Regions, minorities and European policies:
A policy report on Muslim Minorities (Turks and Muslim Bulgarians)
in Central South Planning Region (Bulgaria)**

Presentation of the Specific Case

The project studies the effects of European economic integration on territorially concentrated ethnic minorities and their politics, as well as on their relations with the national majority and the state. We have selected two Muslim minority groups – Turks and Muslim Bulgarians (Pomaks) in three districts of the South-Central region of Bulgaria, located along the border with Greece and Turkey – Smolian district (SD), Kardzhali district (KD) and Haskovo district (HD).

Political changes in Bulgaria in the end of 1989 and the subsequent democratization made it possible to fully restore the rights of ethnic and religious communities. Fifteen years after we can state that nowadays in the country there are both the legal mechanisms and the political will to guarantee and respect the human and minority rights of the compact Muslim population (Turkish and Bulgarian).

Bulgaria has signed and ratified all internationally-adopted conventions on human rights protection: the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1997, ratified in 1999); the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, automatically making them part of its own legislation. In December 2002, the National Assembly adopted the new Law on Religions, which declared the interference of the state in the internal organization of the religious communities inadmissible. In its Annual Reports (from 1998 to 2004) on the progress of Bulgaria in regard with its EU accession, the European Commission regularly marks that Bulgaria respects human rights and freedoms, and that it fulfills the political criteria for membership, set by the European Council in Copenhagen in 1993.

Socio-economic situation in the region is characterized, on the one hand, by the presence of favorable conditions for economic growth (natural resources, qualified and experienced work-force), and on the other, by serious problems in the sphere of employment possibilities, the development of private business, infrastructure and protection of natural environment. Some of the problems were inherited from the socialist period (mainly regarding the infrastructure and protection of natural environment). The others are a result of slow and painful transition to market economy, sluggish and non-effective privatization, closure of enterprises without taking social measures for providing alternative employment to laid-off workers, low purchasing prices of agricultural products (including the tobacco), dumping import of agricultural products from the neighboring countries (Greece, Turkey and Macedonia), low consumption power of the population, and of underdeveloped regional markets.

Recently, successful negotiations of Bulgaria for EU membership brought more optimism into the prospects for the future. The purposeful efforts of the last two governments and of the local authorities to revive the economic life in the region through the appropriate investment policy – in which pre-accession EU funds play a significant role, – are beginning to have an effect. Funds are sought for stimulating the employers to hire the unemployed and for optimization of training courses and programs for qualification and re-qualification, including the introduction of alternative systems for vocational training and for qualifications on municipal and regional level.

Of the three **pre-accession programs**, financed by the EU (**PHARE**, **ISPA** and **SAPARD**), the most important for the development of the SCR was the PHARE program and especially the National PHARE Program and the programs for Trans-Border Cooperation (PHARE–CBC).

In 2000, when the financial memorandum on the **PHARE–NP program** “Economic and Social Alignment” (ESA) was signed, SCR was one of the priority regions. Projects in the following areas were financed: 1) Human resources development; 2) Development of the manufacturing sector; 3) Assisting the development of tourism.

The **PHARE-TBC program** was launched in Bulgaria in 1994 and for SCR was exceptionally important the sub-program **PHARE–TBC Bulgaria–Greece**, which is being implemented along the whole of the natural border between the two counties – the Rhodope mountain. Priorities for the region according to this program are: transport, environment, communications, economic development, social development and agriculture. It is worth to mention some of the most important projects which were financed on the territory of the SCR: “Road II–86 Construction of an access road to Cross-border Checkpoint Rudozem”; “Regional Monitoring Network for Radio-Ecological Monitoring of Southern Bulgaria”; “Program for Elimination of Uranium Mine Impact in Southern Bulgaria”; “Construction of Three Urban Wastewater Treatment Facilities along the Arda River Basin: at Madan, Rudozem and Zlatograd”.

In April 2004, three additional financial memoranda within the PHARE program were signed and two of them fall under the TBC initiative for 2003 (between Bulgaria and Greece for 20 million Euro). The third memorandum is the first, which Bulgaria signed under the initiative of the program PHARE–“External borders 2003” in respect to the future external borders of EU (between Bulgaria and Turkey, Serbia and Montenegro, and Macedonia).

The impact of the other two programs, from which Bulgaria is receiving funds – SAPARD and ISPA – so far, is difficult to assess. Projects from the ISPA program, which, albeit only partially, are realized on the territory of SCR, are dealing with transport infrastructure (“Reconstruction and electrification of the railway line Plovdiv–Svilengrad–Greek/Turkish border”); and in the sphere of environment are directed mainly towards investments in management of waste waters, canalization systems and water supply, waste management in cities and air pollution (“Collection and treatment of city waste waters and water supply in the city of Smolian”; „Construction of the regional center for waste management–Kardzhali”). In contrast to the financing through ISPA, which is realized on the governmental level, assistance through SAPARD is intended for individual agricultural proprietors, farmers and municipalities and virtually meets serious difficulties which are largely discussed not only among politicians and scholars but also on public level.

Socio-economic situation and regional development in the scholarly literature and the press

The issues of economic development and future prospects of the regions, populated by minorities or located in border areas, have recently received much attention in scholarly works and in public sphere. Most of the publications are a result of field research and include expert analysis of the situation and recommendations for appropriate policies. Several research projects were conducted with the objective to draw the attention of local and central authorities to the need for a comprehensive program for development of the region, adapted to the local resources and population, and to the programs of the ARM (the Association of Rhodope Municipalities), non-governmental organizations and others. They represented a good and clearly defined basis for future activities, linked to the management and implementation of the EU pre-accession funds. Among them it is worth to mention the following: *The Rhodope Mountains – the Pains of the Transition* (1998); *The Agrarian Reform, Regional Development and Business Opportunities in Regions with Ethnically Mixed Population* (1999); *The Social Profile of the Ethnic Groups in Bulgaria* (2000), *Problems and Prospects of the Development of the Eastern Rhodopes* (2002); *Emigration Patterns in the Rhodope Mountains* (2002).

The main conclusions were that the economic crisis was sharper in the regions with mixed population and that its features included economic stagnation, mono-cultural agriculture (raising tobacco) on small plots, undeveloped infrastructure, higher than average for the country level of unemployment, and pauperization of the larger part of population.

The process of restitution of the pre-1946 land ownership put the Muslim population at disadvantage. Bulgarians historically possessed more land, which was usually situated on more fertile and flat areas. The land owned by Turks and Pomaks as a rule was eroded, deforested or insufficient to provide for a living. Thus agriculture was not a viable solution to poverty and unemployment in southern Bulgaria. Tobacco production that provided the basic means of living for more than half of the Muslim population in the Rhodope mountains suffered severe crisis. Since 1991 tobacco production decreased several times. The state firm that was a monopolist in this area – *Bulgartabak* ('Bulgarian tobacco') – reduced the purchasing prices and delayed payments for years.

There were no signs in the 1990s of an economic uplift or sustainable revival of the local economy in the Rhodopes. The structural reform made things worse because most of the mining and processing enterprises in the south were closed down, thus increasing the already high levels of unemployment among Turks and Pomaks. The process of privatization of state enterprises has been very slow and the development of private businesses negligible. A slight improvement was observed only in those municipalities where revival of enterprises and interest towards private businesses occurred. More often, however, there was a lack of initiative, information and clear strategy for starting a private business. Local people viewed private initiative as a survival strategy, not as means for increasing revenues. They obviously preferred small businesses with minimum investment risk – mostly trade. The few foreign companies (mostly textile – Greek in Western Rhodopes and Turkish in Eastern Rhodopes) had created new problems, instead of solving the issue of high female unemployment: longer working hours, lack of social insurance and wages which were even lower than the minimal wage defined for the country. This led to further dissatisfaction with the local and central authorities. Similar social-economic conditions in the Rhodopes did not lead to serious stratification of the population. However there was a certain inequality in the social-economic status of the different ethno-cultural groups (e.g. Turks and Muslim Bulgarians), which was visible when compared with the average levels for the country. The conclusion was that unemployment and underprivileged position on the labor market of the Turkish population were a consequence of economic difficulties in the employment spheres, traditionally occupied by the Turks, and in the regional disproportions. Hence the social isolation and limited access of the population to education, culture, politics and other spheres of public life. The concrete recommendations were: practical implementation of the envisaged rights of the Turkish population with the aid of expert teams, working in partnership with representatives of the community. The migrations of Turks and Pomaks due to unemployment, low standard of living, and limited possibilities for personal and professional development was another important research issue. But despite the high level of emigration and the tendency among the young (up to 30–35 years of age) to permanently settle abroad, it is difficult to speak about persistent emigration patterns.

The researchers pointed out that the problems of the economic development of districts with mixed population have to be solved with the help of the special programs and strategies for development. Investments in the regional infrastructure were also important. The construction of the necessary border check-points should be accelerated. Another recommendation was to boost the concrete projects and to stimulate a larger interest on the side of Greece. Some of the authors recommend a policy of giving loans to small and medium-size enterprises in the region, and of linking the production with the market capacities. Another important recommendation was to

promote local, municipal initiatives, which consider the specific features, instead of leaning on decisions, made on the central level.

Still, the majority of academic research made by sociologists, political scientists, ethnologists, historians, anthropologists, and geographers of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences or the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" hardly pay any attention to the development of regional institutions in connection with the implementation of the EU funds. These issues were examined in the studies of A. Dzholdzhov and V. Marinov – two authors who in recent years specialized in the sphere of regional policies and regional development. In the book "Regional Policy in the Process of EU accession" (1998) they represented a comparative analysis of the experience and practice of several countries (EU member-states and accession countries), which have accomplished the institutionalization of the regional development. The study presented also the EU requirements towards Bulgaria, the EU regional policy and some interesting ideas about the possibilities for utilization of structural funds and respective instruments in the pre-accession period. Object of analysis in the second book by the same authors ("Regional Policy in Bulgaria: State, Assessment and Perspectives", 2001) were specific problems of Bulgarian regional policy. The authors believe that the inter-regional differences between district and municipal authorities in the planning regions, and the relations "center/periphery" in the border areas, rural areas and areas with high concentration of minorities, lead to creation of "pockets of poverty," migration, etc. In the early 1990s, the reforms and the consolidation of institutions were conducted on the national level and rarely took the regional aspect into consideration. At the same time, regional authorities and private business were not engaged and were limited by the lack of resources and skills. The requirements of the EU regarding regional policy, were sometimes contradictory in concrete stipulations, not clear enough and changing due to the development of the policy for social-economic rapprochement. There was also another controversial approach, not accepted by some experts: the priority of the national growth over the decrease in the regional and district differences. If the balance was not found between the policy of assisting the underdeveloped regions and of stimulating areas for growth, there was even a danger of Bulgarian regional policy ceasing to be "regional". The necessity for establishing qualified administrative units for the realization of the EU programs has also been mentioned. The topical issue of decentralization of the management of structural funds and pre-accession instruments of the EU was also discussed. World Bank Development Report 1999/2000 recommends that this principle should be respected, but by taking into consideration local political traditions. One of the authors argues that decentralization could endanger the macroeconomic stability and should be understood more like transfer of responsibility from European Commission towards the states, than as a regional decentralization. Another important issue is the financing of the district plans for regional development predominantly from the national sources, since the revenues of the municipalities are limited and formed on the centralized level, which makes the municipalities unreliable partners for co-financing of the projects. But on the other hand, the expert evaluation shows that the Bulgarian municipalities have greater freedom of action in the sphere of economy compared to other European countries, which is a good precondition for expansion of their jurisdiction in the area of regional development.

Conclusion

Recent scholarly research and press publications on economic development and future prospects of the three districts (Haskovo, Smolian and Kardzhali) and their participation in the implementation of pre-accession funds, outline a set of specific problems and tried to propose adequate solutions how to improve the present situation. They could be summarized in three points:

1) Assessment of Problems / Favorable conditions:

The economic crisis is sharper in the highland border regions with mixed population. The social-economic situation there has the characteristics of economic stagnation, high level of unemployment, mono-culture type of agriculture on small plots, underdeveloped infrastructure and pauperization of the larger part of population. The result is: social isolation and limited access to education, culture, politics and other spheres of public life. Despite the high level of emigration for economic reasons and the tendency among the young people to permanently settle abroad, the emigrations are mostly viewed as temporary work abroad.

However, similar social-economic conditions in the Rhodopes do not lead to serious social stratification of the population; however there is a certain inequality in the economic status of the different ethno-cultural groups (Turks and Muslim Bulgarians). Still, the level of multi-ethnic tolerance is considerably high and no conditions for possible conflicts on ethnic grounds exist.

2) Warning: Weak points in local/regional/central policies and lack of business initiative

From the early 1990s the high level of centralization (institutional, economic and financial) has been assessed as the main obstacle for the development of local/regional economic policies. All the important reforms and the construction of new institutions were conducted on national level for a long time and rarely took the regional aspect into consideration. As a result regional and local authorities were not engaged and were limited by the lack of resources and skills. In the economic development the priority was the national growth over the decrease in the regional and district differences.

The slow rate of implementation of pre-accession funds on local level is due to red-tape and the mediation of formal institutions like the Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises. This circumstance is further aggravated by the stipulation that the state should co-finance each project; the complicated rules and procedures of the European Commission, which have to be strictly followed, while the Bulgarian local and regional administration is still learning how to manage projects, also seems to be a serious problem.

Low interest to pre-accession programmes (especially SAPARD) among local contractors also have reasonable explanation: the program subsidizes only a half of the investment, and the agricultural proprietors have to take bank loans at their own risk. That is why they can afford only small-scale projects. Often there is a lack of initiative, information and clear strategy for development of private business.

3) Solution of the Problems – Expert Recommendations:

The decentralization of the management of pre-accession instruments of the EU seems to be the most adequate solution, yet the experts warn that the decentralization could endanger the macroeconomic stability in the country. Another important recommendation is to increase investments in regional infrastructure and accelerate the construction of the necessary border check-points. Yet those measures alone will by no means help to overcome the historically inherited economic and ethno-cultural marginalization of the region. The necessity for establishing qualified administrative units for the realization of the EU programs should also not be neglected.

Annex II: Mapping of Research Competences Reports

Summary

The criteria for choosing the three institutions stated below are that two of them – Sofia State University and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences have long-standing traditions in research work among minority groups in Bulgaria; albeit relatively new institution – The New Bulgarian University has recently proved as one of the leading institutions in teaching and carrying out research work on minority issues. We have also tried to propose useful contacts with scholars with different background: Prof. Ts. Georgieva is a historian and has done a lot of anthropological research as well; Assoc. Prof. I. Tomova is a sociologist, Assoc. Prof. P. Kabakchieva – a philosopher, and Prof. Y. Konstantinov – a linguist and a author of some of the most serious works on the anthroponymy and identity of Pomak community.

List of leading institutions and scholars:

Research institution 1

Full name and contact information

Prof. Tsvetana Georgieva, DSc (phone (W) +3592 9308 280, e-mail: cveta123@clio.uni-sofia.bg; phone (H) +3592822 website: <http://www.clio.uni-sofia.bg>)

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Head of the Ethnology Department is Ass. Prof. Krasimir Stoilov

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The Department organizes research expeditions in Bulgaria, in the neighboring Balkan countries and in Europe. Among the most important field studies in the last years are:

1) In the country:

- Middle Rhodopes and Thrace: contemporary state of folk culture and international relationships;
- Strandzha Mountain: the "holy places", sacred cults and fire-dancing;
- Macedonia of the Pirin region and in Northern Bulgaria: ethnography of socialism;
- Northern Bulgaria: ethnography of ethnic groups and structures of government;
- Southeastern Bulgaria: folk culture.

2) Abroad: in Poland: terrain studies of the Polish village; and on the Balkans – in Serbia, Macedonia, Greece, Turkey and Albania: ethnic and cultural interactions. In 1996 was established the Students' Academic Ethnological Society.

The Department organizes and participates in students' conferences on problems covering the whole range of ethnographic research in Bulgaria.

The main bibliography on the topic:

Georgieva, Ts. (1999) "Coexistence as a System of Everyday Life of Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria", *Ethnologia Balkanica*, 3, 59–84.

Georgieva, Ts. (1998c): "Mezhdu traditsiata i modernostta. (Prehodat i prehodite v Kardzhali)", Georgieva, Ts. (ed.), *Kardzhali: Ot Traditsiata kam Modersnostta*, Sofia: IMIR, pp. 9–40.

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Georgieva, Ts. (1994b): “Coexistence as a System in the Everyday Life of Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria”, A. Zhelyaskova (ed.), *Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility Between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria*, Sofia: IMIR, pp.151 – 172 (also in Bulgarian: “Sazhitelstvoto kato sistema vav vsekidnevnia zhivot na hristianite i miusiulmanite v Balgaria”, pp. 140–159; and in *Ethnologia Balkanica*, 1999, 3: 59 – 84).

Georgieva, Ts. (1994a) Hora i bogove na Balkanite, *Balkanistichen forum*, No 2, pp. 33–42.

Georgieva, Ts. (1993) “The structure of power in the traditional communities of Bulgarian Mohamedans in the region of Chech (western Rhodopes)”, *The Ethnic Situation in Bulgaria*, pp. 59–69.

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Research institution 2

Full name and contact information

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Since 2004 – **Deputy Director** of the Institute of Sociology (Bulgarian Academy of Science)

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The Institute of Sociology (founded in 1968) is the most important research center in the field of contemporary sociology in Bulgaria. The Institute conducts basic and field research, provides postgraduate education and specialized expertise. Many scientists from the Institute teach sociology at universities and colleges throughout the country.

General sociology theory, medium-range theories, methodology and history of sociology, specialized branches of contemporary sociology are elaborated in the Institute. Academic autonomy and freedom secures the coexistence and elaboration of competing sociological paradigms.

The research strategies of the Institute of Sociology are aimed at the study and analysis of social stratification and mobility, institutional transformation and regional development, etc. within the context of globalization and Bulgaria's transitions to a market economy and democracy.

These are the basic research fields scientists at the Institute of Sociology: social organizations and politics; work and employment, poverty and unemployment; ethnosociology and social psychology, ethnic communities and conflict, social integration and segregation; deviant behaviour, delinquency, corruption, etc.; science and education, technological innovation and personality; religion and everyday life, secularization, intellectualization and rationalization, moral relativism and quasi-religiousness; village and agriculture; methodology of sociological survey and public opinion studies. The scientific achievements of the Institute of Sociology contribute to the description, understanding and explanation of society, thus providing an adequate basis for tackling pressing social issues.

The main bibliography on the topic:

Tomova, I. (2000): “Social Change and Ethnoreligious Relations”, *The Neighbourhood of the Religious Communities in Bulgaria*, ed. Georgy Fotev. Institute of Sociology, BAS, Sofia.

Tomova, I. (1998): “Rodopite prez 90-te godini”, I. Tomova (ed.), *Planinata Rodopi – Usiliata na Prehoda*, Sofia: Institute of East-European Humanities, pp. 5–29

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Research institution 3

Full name and contact information

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Anthropology Department (founded 1993) at NBU is an open community of lecturers in specific scientific area. They implement research projects, prepare of programs of study and carry out various marketing researching. Anthropology Department initiates contacts with national and international educational institutions. The structure of the Anthropology Department is connected with the working model of West European and North American Universities.

The main bibliography on the topic:

Konstantinov, Y. (2000): "Three Pomak stories: the story of Imam", Y. Konstantinov, ed. *In and Out of the Collective. Virtual Journal*, No 3 (January 2000).

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Konstantinov, Y. (1999a): "Three Pomak stories: the story of Osman", Y. Konstantinov, ed. *In and Out of the Collective. Virtual Journal*, No 2 (January 1999).

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Konstantinov, Y., G. Alhang and B. Igla (1991): "Names of the Bulgarian Pomaks", Nordlyd: *Tromsø University Working Papers on Language and Linguistics*, 17: 8 – 117.

Research institution 4

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Sociology of Social Regulation, Sociology of European Integration and European civilisation process are the main courses of Petya Kabakchieva at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski.

The main bibliography on the topic:

Kabakchieva, P. (2003): *From Local to Regional Identity. The Possible Construction of Cross-Border Regional Identity. Case Study of a Border Region: Smolian*, NEXUS (<http://www.cas.bg>)

Kabakchieva, P. (2003): "Kak se konstruira transgranichen region", *Godishnik na Sofiiskia Universitet-FF*, vol. 94, pp. 69–100.

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